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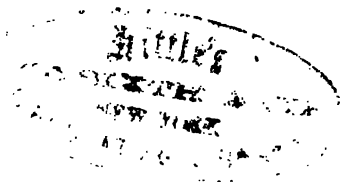
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PROLOGUE.—THE BARGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

LARES AND PENATES.

"**HURRAH!** I've got it. You dear, darling Agnes, what do you think of that? Yes, I've got it—really and truly got it, and all in fair fight, so here goes!"

With these words a school-boy's cap was flung high into the air, and then, being dexterously recaptured, was made to whirl in frantic gyrations round the head of its owner. This was a tall, comely youth, who might have been styled boy or young man, according to the age of the person called upon to make the definition—that is to say, he was somewhere between sixteen and seventeen years old. He had just come bursting into a room where a woman about ten years his senior sat nursing a baby at the fireside, while two other very young children played near her—a homely interior enough, but made cosy-looking by bright candle-light, red stuff curtains closely drawn, and a well-spread tea-table. The time was a winter evening in the year 184—.

The woman looked up with a face which, though it lacked the youthful freshness of the boy's, was not unlike his in its general shape and dark yet clear complexion.

"What, Harry? The scholarship?"

"Yea, got it as sure as my name is Harold Maxwell, and all the masters as pleased and complimentary—'pon my word, I think they laid the butter on almost too thick. If you had only been there; but of course you couldn't because of baby. So I'm to go to Oxford next term—was there ever any thing half so jolly?"

"My dear, dear Harry! I am so glad—so proud— But I always knew my brother would make me proud of him."

The boy shook back the hair joyously from his temples.

"Well, well, I don't know about proud; but you shall never be ashamed of me, that's one thing certain. Nor you either, young shaver," he went on, coming forward to pinch the baby's cheek, who acknowledged the attention by kicking and crowing uproariously. "What a little Turk it is! and knows that I'm his uncle as well—ah! as well as the other rogues there."

With this the young uncle got on his knees to kiss and hug the other two children, who came pressing about him, stroking him and poking him and fighting him with such gusto as showed that he was a familiar and favorite play-fellow.

"Ah! you monkeys, is that the way you serve me? Why, how strong Aggy is growing! She'll be more than a match for me soon, and as for Austy, he's a perfect prize-fighter. Look, I've

not forgotten you, here's some toffee to eat my health with; you must learn to be as glad of the good news as I am. But seriously," and here the lad sprang once more to his feet, and approached his sister with glowing cheeks, "isn't it glorious good news? Ah! you dear Agnes, I knew how pleased you would be. And how pleased Austin will be too, won't he? He has not come in yet, I suppose?"

"Not yet. I expect him every minute. Yes, indeed he will be delighted, I can answer for him, and as proud of you as I am."

"Well, he may be proud of himself if he likes, for it was all his doing. Ah! Agnes, I haven't said any thing about it yet, but you need not think I have forgotten it. He's the primest fellow breathing, and I hope I shall live to pay him back something of what he has done for me, that's all. What, Austy, at it again, are you?"

In another moment he was once more on his knees, giving himself up to a game of romps with the children, while their mother looked on with radiant eyes which showed how happy the youth's tidings had made her. And here, leaving the brother and sister thus occupied, it may be well to say a few words of their antecedents and present circumstances.

They were the only children of a country surgeon who had once been very successful in his profession, but who had died some years since considerably straitened in his means, leaving behind him barely enough to keep his son and daughter out of actual want, to say nothing of securing a suitable education for the boy, then little more than a child. Fortunately, however, the daughter had just before her father's death accepted an offer of marriage from one Austin Waters—a handsome young fellow who, perhaps by reason of his handsomeness, had succeeded in finding the way to her heart. At the time of the engagement he had been considered by her friends as rather beneath her in station, being only a clerk in a Liverpool merchant's office; but now, measured by the standard of her altered prospects, his salary seemed to promise her a position of comparative affluence. Her own future was thus safe, but she was not satisfied until she had provided for that of her young brother also, by stipulating that he should be an inmate of her new home—a condition easily assented to by Waters, who was both an ardent lover and a good-natured fellow to boot. The arrangement then made had continued in force ever since, working to the entire satisfaction of all parties concerned, so that the head of the household had never been heard to complain of the burdens which it had laid

These had indeed been very slight at first, the trifle which young Harold inherited from his father nearly or quite sufficing for his maintenance and early education; but within the last two or three years they had materially increased in consequence of his strongly developed taste for study, and his sister's anxiety that it should not be thwarted. Thus, at an age when other lads in his position are put to earn their own livelihood, he was still a diligent learner in a grammar-school near Liverpool, even aspiring so high as to compete for a scholarship offered as a prize for distinguished merit. Of course, in his circumstances, he would not have been able to devote himself to study with so much industry and success but for some little pecuniary assistance from his brother-in-law, towards whom, as has been seen, he did not fail to declare himself grateful.

The game of romps was still proceeding with unabated vigor, when the sound of a key being fitted into the lock of the street-door made the young student look round with an expression of pleased expectation. There was a heavy step in the passage, and then, the door of the little parlor being rather boisterously and gustily flung open, the master of the house made his appearance.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, well-made man, still young—he was scarcely thirty—and still young-looking, with a fresh-colored complexion, and handsome if not very strongly individualized features, set off with abundant dark brown hair and whiskers. His voice was generally loud and sonorous, though with an occasional tendency to raise its inflections at the end of a sentence, which was apt to impair its mellowness, and to suggest to an observer of character either some latent irresoluteness of purpose or possible querulousness of temper. It has been said that his voice was loud, and it may be added that not only his voice, but his whole manner, was sometimes, as on the present occasion, a little too much inclined to noisiness to be quite that of a gentleman; but then his noisiness was so manifestly an expression of the greater or less degree of joyousness which might be within him that nobody could have had the heart to find fault with it.

"Well, here I am!" he exclaimed on entering, rubbing his hands cheerily the while. "Hallo, Austy, hallo, Aggy, and how are you getting along? Hands off, younkers, or you'll pull me to pieces between you. But my stars! if here isn't Uncle Harry back from the examination. Well, my lad, what news? Out with it."

"He has succeeded, Austin," put in Mrs. Waters triumphantly. "He is going to Oxford next term."

"Going to Oxford, is he!" echoed her husband, bringing his broad palms together with a smack that made the tea-things ring. "Well done, Harry; but I always said he would be the big man of the family. Going to Oxford! Shake hands on it, my boy, and here's long life and good luck to you!"

So saying, he seized the youth's hand in both his, and shook it with might and main.

"I'm sure, Austin, I never can say how much obliged I am to you," said the boy, blushing up to his eyes at the exuberance of his brother-in-law's congratulations. "Not only for your kindness just now, you know, but all along. It was all through you I was ever able to do it, I have not forgotten that."

"Pooh, pooh! not a word, my dear fellow, not a word. It's we who have got to thank you for being such a big man, and giving us somebody to be proud of. Why, you'll be a judge or a bishop some day, or member of Parliament at the very least; and then shan't we boast of you, and won't little Harry stand six inches higher in his shoes to think that he has got such a god-father? Eh! baby, eh! won't you? Bless me, how that child does grow! And now, Agnes, perhaps you won't mind putting him down and giving me a bit of something, for I'm as hungry as a wolf. Come along, let's sit down and be jolly, and Harry will tell us all about the examination. Now, children, be a little quiet, if you can."

The baby was laid down, and the rest of the family being settled round the tea-table, Mr. Waters applied himself to the business of the meal with as much diligence as was compatible with attention to the claims of a hungry little mouth on each side, and a desire to lose nothing of what his brother-in-law was saying about the examination. It was some time before the confusion abated, but at last, the children having been plied with bread and jam to their hearts' content, and Harold having finished his account of the day's proceedings amid fresh congratulations, there came a momentary lull, during which the master of the house sat silently stirring his tea, with a contemplative air not usual with him. Presently he looked round the table, and, still stirring his tea thoughtfully, began: "By-the-way, I have news to-day too. Uncle Gilbert is in Liverpool just now."

"Your uncle Gilbert here!" said Mrs. Waters in manifest surprise. "No, surely!"

"Yes, but he is though; they were talking about him at the office to-day—old Waters, the Bristol banker, they called him—little thinking, of course, that I was his own full nephew. Yes, he is really in Liverpool—looking up some debts, they say. And do you know, he is actually going to give up business!"

"Give up business! I should have thought he was a great deal too fond of making money for that."

"Yes, but there's one thing he is still fonder of, and that is, of keeping it when he has made it, and I dare say he gets more afraid of the risks of business as he grows older. And perhaps (though I suppose that's hardly possible), perhaps he thinks he has made enough by this time. They say he is worth a hundred and fifty thousand—what do you think of that? A hundred and fifty thousand!"

"It seems a great deal, certainly," acquiesced Mrs. Waters in rather awe-struck tones.

"A great deal—I should think it was," said her husband, stirring his tea again, a little more vigorously this time. "A strange thing, eh, that I should be the only relation he has in the world, and pottering on at two hundred a year, while he is counting his money by the hundred thousand. And here he is in the same town, and I suppose wouldn't so much as say how d'ye do if he was to see me."

And as Austin Waters spoke thus, the tendency of his voice to an upward inflection made itself more audible than it had yet done this evening.

"Never mind, dear Austin," said Mrs. Waters soothingly. "It is very sad to be on bad terms

a relation, of course, and it was cruel to quarrel with you just because you were generous enough to marry a wife without money; still I often thought that very likely you would have been no better off if he had continued friendship with you. Every body says he is such a dread-ful miser, you know—"

"Oh yes! miser enough, that's certain. But you go and think that I am complaining, as—of course I know it can't be helped. No, all I mean to say is that it is very queer to me of my being so poor with a rich old fellow that for an uncle, and you can't deny that it is uncommon queer, and rather trying, too, per-haps."

"It isn't such a pleasant thing to be poor one need pretend to like it."

"Well now, I'm not so sure of that," put in old Smith with boyish decision. "You may laugh, in, and I dare say you will, but for my part I think a fellow ought to be better pleased being poor at first, because then, do you see, he got to make up the score with your own eyes, and that is ever so much jollier than taking odds. And you may say that rich chaps—begin that begin by being rich, I mean—have given them whether they like it or not, and my word I have often thought it very hard on them, I have indeed. There, you think me outrageous green, don't you, but that's my way of raving at things, and I'm sure you'd find it a very comfortable way if you'd only take it."

"Ah! it's well enough for you to talk so now," Mr. Waters, balancing his spoon on the edge of his tea-cup with a slightly discontented air, "but only wait till you are my age, and you'll find that money is a better thing than you think. I expect ever to see much of it, good-fortune knows. Some people in this world are cut for luck, and some aren't."

With this the speaker sighed, and the spoon fell from his cup.

"Come, come, Austin, how do you know that?" said the boy. "I'll tell you what—don't you tell your head about it, and perhaps some day old fellow's money may come tumbling in to suit when you least expect it."

"Ah! it's all very fine, but I know Uncle Gilbert better than you do, and I know that when fate takes a thing into his head he sticks to it vax. Why, if he had ever intended to be a miser, wouldn't he have taken some notice of it? I was fool enough to write him on his last day?—and that's more than three months ago, you see. No, no, not a penny of his money will ever come my way, so I may as well keep my mind to do without it."

"Well, better do without it than be hanging round for it all your life," said Harold stoutly. "A fellow who does nothing but look to see how other fellows send their balls can't do much good with his own, you know. Don't you tell the blues, Austin, I'll back you to turn up your eyes without Uncle Gilbert to help you."

"I'm not in the blues, as you call it, I only hate money is money, and that it's a hard thing to see one's nearest relations wallowing in it while one is as poor as a church mouse oneself. And so it is hard—confounded hard. I am very sorry, Austin," murmured Mrs. Waters's gentle deprecating voice from the other side of the table—"very sorry indeed, and all the more, of course, to think that it happened on

my account. Though still it was not my fault that he chose to be so unkind, and I am sure you know, dear, that so far as I can repay you by trying to make you happy—"

"Happy, you darling!" interrupted her husband, the implied appeal to his magnanimity restoring him to his pristine good-humor as if by magic. "Happy"—and he emphasized the word by jumping up and rapping the table—"I'm the happiest dog alive, and if you think for one moment that I regret—What! haven't I got you, and haven't I got the children, and haven't I got Harry, and isn't it a pride and a pleasure to do what I can for you all? Not that I don't like my work for its own sake, mind you; it would be strange if I didn't at the rate I'm getting on. If you had only been in the office to hear the way old Smith was talking to-day! I shouldn't wonder a bit if he raises me another fifty before I'm a month older, and wouldn't that be glorious—two hundred and fifty a year! Happy—I should think I was happy. Give us a kiss, Agnes, and never talk such nonsense again. And you, Harry, shake hands; you were right, and I was wrong; the money is all my eye, filthy lucre, eh? And now we'll have another cup, and mother shall give Austy and Aggy some more jam, and we'll all be jolly together."

He returned to his place between the two children with a beaming face in which were reflected the loving looks cast at him by his wife from the other end of the table, while Austy and Aggy, ogling Uncle Harry with all their might, drummed loudly on their plates in token of satisfaction, and even the baby sent forth from his cradle at the fireside a sympathetic coo of approval. Never, surely, was there a happier family group, and that evening would probably have been for all present one of the pleasantest they had ever known, but for an interruption which came just as the enjoyment thus reached its height.

Somebody knocked smartly at the street-door.

"Hallo! what's that?" said the head of the family, stopping in the act of conveying a spoonful of jam to one of the little plates on each side of him. "A visitor at this time of day! Shall I go and see who it is?"

"It must be some mistake, surely," said Mrs. Waters, looking a little annoyed. "No, you needn't trouble yourself—there is Susan going."

The bustling footstep of a small maid-of-all-work was heard pattering along the passage, and the street-door having been opened, another footstep—a slow creaking one this time—was heard advancing towards the parlor.

"Oh! sir," said the little maid-servant, putting in her head, "here's a gentleman who—"

But before she had time to complete the sentence, a figure appeared behind hers, at sight of which Austin Waters gave a great start of recognition, while, transfixed to his chair in sheer astonishment, he exclaimed tremulously:

"Uncle Gilbert!"

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE GILBERT.

FOR some seconds a solemn silence rested on all that little group, the eyes of every one turned as by a kind of fascination toward

doorway. And yet the figure which stood there scarcely seemed calculated to command any extraordinary tribute of respect or deference, being simply that of a wiry withered little old man of sixty-five or so, attired in a tight-fitting suit of rather rusty black, with scanty iron-gray hair and whiskers, and sunken gray eyes surrounded by innumerable crows'-feet. But insignificant as Uncle Gilbert looked, he was known to be worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and the mysterious hush that greeted his entrance was an act of homage which all present unconsciously combined to render to Mammon as embodied in his person.

He remained standing for some time on the threshold, surveying those in the room with a grim smile, in apparent enjoyment of the effect produced by his presence; then, coming a step forward, he began, still with the same grim smile:

"Well, Nephew Austin, so you know me again, I see."

His voice was naturally harsh and grating, and, whether for this reason or simply because it was that of a stranger, the baby most unfortunately took the opportunity of setting up a lamentable howl.

Uncle Gilbert frowned.

"I can't stand this, you know. I'm ready to go away without troubling you further, but I can't stay in the same room with such a row as that. Can't you put a stop to it, somebody?"

The last words were spoken to the little maid-servant, who, infected by the general awe, had fallen back into the passage, where she stood regarding the new-comer in mute consternation, and uncertain whether her further services were required. As she found herself thus invoked, she looked timidly towards her master for instructions.

"Yes, yes, take him away," was the impatient answer. "I am very sorry you should be so annoyed, uncle, but—"

"Never mind, so long as there's no more of it. Perhaps if the young woman could make it convenient to clear the other couple off at the same time— I'm uncommon fond of children, you see, only I like their room better than their company, he! he!"

"Get away, children, get away," said the father, lifting first one child and then the other off its chair in a great hurry. "There, be quiet, and get along with Susan—there."

He pushed them all out very unceremoniously, and then, having shut the door upon them, approached his uncle penitently.

"I'm sure, uncle, I'm very sorry—"

"That will do. And now that we are a little quiet again, perhaps you had better introduce me to your wife. This is the lady, I suppose? How do you do, ma'am? Well, as my nephew had the grace to write me a civil letter some months ago, you see I have come to look at you at last—on the principle of making the best of a bad job, you know, ma'am."

Poor Mrs. Waters colored, and forced a faint smile by way of answer. There was a short pause, nobody in the room finding anything to say in reply to a speech which all felt to be very rude. One person indeed appeared as though he would have liked to say something, and that was young Harold, who looked up with a quick flush

of indignation as his sister was thus addressed. But if he had any idea of speaking he restrained himself, and merely turned his eyes with something of an expectant expression towards Austin Waters.

Austin Waters, however, only said:

"Won't you take a seat, uncle?"

The old man let himself slowly drop into a chair, glancing round him as he did so in swift yet searching observation of the room and its occupants. Perhaps there was something in Harold's look which he noticed and understood, for presently his keen gray eyes fastened themselves on the youth with some severity, while he asked his nephew:

"And pray who is this young gentleman, if I may make so bold?"

"Only Harold Maxwell—my wife's brother, you know, uncle, who lives with us," explained Austin with great urbanity.

"Oh indeed! your wife's brother who lives with you. Yes, I think I have heard of that arrangement—a very pleasant one for the young gentleman, no doubt, and remarkably economical."

The lad's face became scarlet, but still he said nothing, this time not even raising his eyes. Mrs. Waters grew very red too, and looked towards her husband. He was evidently a good deal discomposed, and shuffled uneasily in his chair as though not knowing very well what to say. After a while he spoke.

"It was very kind of you to come to see us this evening, I'm sure."

"Well, I happened to be in Liverpool, and I thought I wouldn't leave without seeing you. A cup of tea, Mrs. Waters, if you please."

Mrs. Waters rose, and nervously set about making fresh tea. The old man watched her for a moment, then resumed, lightly switching a few grains of dust from his knee with a pair of black gloves which he invariably carried when he went out, but as invariably abstained from putting on:

"However, it wasn't only to see you that I took the trouble of turning out this cold evening. The fact is, I have an arrangement to propose."

"I am sure we ought to feel very much gratified, sir," said the nephew politely.

"I think you ought, young man. Well, and now I suppose you want to know what it is. In the first place, then, I have got to tell you that I am retiring from business."

"Yes, uncle. I heard them say something about that in our office this morning."

"Did you indeed? Well, if you hear them again, you may tell them they would do better to mind their own affairs. Yes, I am retiring from business. Money is not so easily made that you need wish to run the chance of losing it again when you have spent your whole life in scraping a little together. So, as there will be nothing to tie me any longer to Bristol, I am thinking of going to live in the country on a little property I have at Chorcombe."

This Chorcombe was a small town in Somersetshire—so small that it will be vain to long for it in an ordinary map—where, as Austin had never known, his uncle was possessed of considerable property, which had some years ago fallen into his hands by the foreclosure of a mortgage.

"Oh! indeed, uncle," assented Austin fully.

"Yes, I have a large house there—one of the best in the place—that has been standing empty eleven quarters; so, as it doesn't seem likely to let, I suppose I may as well occupy it myself. I must live somewhere, you know."

He shook his head gently as though this were a necessity which he rather deplored than otherwise; then slowly went on, stirring the tea which Mrs. Waters had just handed him:

"And I have been thinking, Austin, that, living like that in the country among a lot of strangers who you may be sure will be doing their best to cheat and impose upon me (I know what human nature is), I have been thinking that it would be a good thing at my time of life to have somebody near me that I could depend upon to stand my friend and take care of my interests. I'm not so young as I was (and I don't mind telling you, Austin, I've put by a trifle of money that needs a good deal of seeing after), and if I was ever laid up for a few days it is dreadful to think of what might happen with such a set of harpies looking on. So I was going to say that supposing you choose to give up every thing here, you may come and live at Chorcombe if you like, and in that case I wouldn't mind promising that the bit of money I may have to leave behind shall go to you when I die."

The eyes of the young man glistened; he had never been accustomed to deal with large sums, and the idea of becoming the ultimate possessor of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds was positively bewildering.

"Yes, I have made up my mind," said Uncle Gilbert, casting a sharp glance upward to note the effect of his words. "You are the only relation left me in the world, and I think the money would have more chance of being taken care of in your hands, than if I was to leave it to a lot of dandy clerks and secretaries to build a hospital with, eh?"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Austin gratefully.

"You quite understand, though, what I should expect on your part. You are to come and live at Chorcombe, not in my house, of course—Heaven forbid, with all those squalling babies—but I'll look out one of my little cottages for you that I'll let you have rent-free; there, what do you think of that? And then you will have to live like a gentleman, mind you, as my nephew ought to live, for I shall be the great man of the place naturally, and I can't afford to be disgraced by my relations. If you want work I shall find you odd jobs to do for me that will keep your hand in, but you are never to put pen to paper for any body else, remember. I'm not going to have my nephew hiring himself out by the day, or by the week or the year, either. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Austin with much humility.

"But—but—" asked the old man sharply.

"What am I to do about a salary, sir? I have nothing of my own, you know, and if you would please to consider—"

"I have considered every thing," rejoined the other promptly, "and I have decided to allow you the yearly sum of a hundred pounds. One hundred pounds," he repeated emphatically, "and next to nothing to do for it."

Austin's countenance fell; it was evident that he regarded the hundred pounds from a point of view quite other than his uncle's.

"A hundred pounds a year with a wife and three children to support!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Certainly—a hundred pounds a year. Bless me, what would people nowadays have? Young hearty folks like you, and a pack of children—what sort of cockering up do you want that you turn up your noses at a hundred a year? Why, suppose I tell you what my weekly expenses are, and have been for the last twenty years—and mind, in my position I've been obliged to keep up a kind of style. Just seventeen and eightpence halfpenny on the average of the whole year for every thing but house-rent, and I've wanted for nothing, look you—not a Sunday out of all the fifty-two that I don't have my hot joint and clean shirt in honor of my Saviour, and I should like to know who need do better than that."

He looked round with an air of stern defiance; then, finding that no one ventured to differ from him, descended from dogma to argument.

"And you'll bear in mind that Chorcombe comes cheaper than Bristol by a great deal—beef twopence-halfpenny a pound less, and mutton twopence, and I know I'm right, for I made particular inquiries. Why, a hundred a year in a place like that is a fortune—a perfect fortune. And then look at what you will have to do for it—next to nothing, less than nothing, I may almost say. And I'm getting an old man now, Austin—quite an old man. Ah! I don't suppose you'll have long to wait for my little bit of money."

With this he coughed a hollow-sounding cough, either as a tribute of sympathy to his own infirmities, or by way of enforcing his last argument, for he had not hitherto seemed to be suffering from any particular ailment.

Austin Waters was plainly in great perplexity. For a while he sat meditating with downcast eyes, then, as though desirous of other counsel than his own, he raised his head and glanced inquiringly towards his wife. But his look went unanswered, for she was gazing thoughtfully before her, with her downward-turned face slightly averted, so that he could see nothing of it save that it was very pale.

"Well, is it to be yes or no?" asked the visitor presently.

The nephew started, and was apparently about to speak, when all at once he heard an eager voice at his ear whisper:

"Say no—do say no."

The voice was that of Harold Maxwell, who had been watching the workings of his brother-in-law's countenance with intense anxiety—anxiety that reached its culminating point in the words which had now half involuntarily burst from his lips.

But the words had been heard by others than Austin Waters, for whom alone they had been intended, if indeed they were intended to be heard at all.

The old man turned round briskly.

"Eh? Who said that?"

The boy lowered his eyes and blushed, with all the trepidation of a shy youth who finds himself suddenly called to account by his seniors.

"You are very free with your advice, young gentleman. What do you mean by it, pray?"

The blush on Harold's cheek deepened, but still he did not answer.

"Come, speak up, young fellow, you're ready enough with your tongue just now."

so you want him to say no, do you? and what may that be for? Because you want to keep him as poor as you are likely to be yourself, eh?"

The lad looked up proudly, his face glowing with the indignation which had at length fairly prevailed over his natural shyness.

"Because I think he would be selling himself into slavery," he answered steadily.

The old man looked at the boy, and the boy looked back again at the old man, and war was declared between them as plainly as war was ever declared by hostile glances.

Uncle Gilbert rose and pushed away his chair.

"Well, well, boys and babies have it all their own way in this house, I see. Good-evening, Austin. I need not wait for your answer; you will do as you are told, of course, even if it is to throw away a fortune."

He made a step towards the door, and was evidently ready to carry his threat of departure into execution, when Austin, who had been watching the growth of the quarrel between his uncle and brother-in-law in a sort of stunned dismay, suddenly roused himself to terrified action.

"No, uncle, no, don't go yet—it was not my fault. I am ready to consent to every thing, uncle, I am indeed."

"Oh! you are, are you?" said the visitor grimly, pausing on his way out. "Mind, you need not say yes unless you like. If you are not satisfied, I can find plenty others who will be."

"Oh! but I am satisfied, of course I am satisfied. Do sit down again, Uncle Gilbert, pray."

The young man's hand was laid entreatingly on Uncle Gilbert's arm, who, relaxing into a hard smile, suffered himself to be led back to his seat.

"It is quite understood there is to be no grumbling, then?" he stipulated. "You will be content to take a hundred a year for a little while from a poor old man who is going to leave you all he has in the world?"

"Oh yes! uncle; how can you think—"

"Very well, very well, that's settled. But if you live on a hundred a year, you won't be able to throw away money with both hands, you must recollect. If you want to maintain yonder young gentleman in idleness, for instance—"

"Oh! but it had been all settled already that Harold was to leave us," interrupted Austin, with a look towards his brother-in-law which seemed to implore silence. "He has just won a scholarship at school, and is going to Oxford immediately."

"Going to Oxford! That young sprig going to Oxford!"

"Yes, uncle," answered Austin timidly. "He is a very good fellow, sir, and I'm sure you would say so if you did but know him," he added, with an uneasy feeling that it was his duty to put in a word for one who had so long been a member of his family.

"Oh! I dare say," commented Uncle Gilbert dryly. "Going to Oxford, is he? Well, I'm glad Oxford is not Chorcombe, that's all. Another cup, Mrs. Waters."

And then, his mandate being immediately obeyed, he sipped away with great apparent relish in the midst of a dead silence which all others in the room felt to be intolerably oppressive, but which they were too much under constraint to think of breaking.

Presently he remarked, tapping the cup with his spoon:

"A pretty thing for such as you to be using china like this in common. Now how did you come by these cups? A wedding-present from some idiot or other, I suppose? Wedding-presents—ugh, I've no patience with such foolery."

"We—we bought them, I think," stammered Austin.

"Bought them, did you? I didn't know you had ever had so much money to throw away. And how much may you have paid for the set, eh?"

He turned sharply towards Mrs. Waters, who, feeling his inquisitive eyes fastened on her in piercing scrutiny, brought herself to falter out:

"I forget—it is so long ago, you know—just after we were married."

He lifted up his hands in scandalized astonishment.

"She forgets! Here's pretty housekeeping! High time indeed such a couple were set to practise a little economy. And I suppose you would say you forget the price of the chairs, and the carpet, and the hearth-rug; all preposterously out of keeping with your station, allow me to remark. Why, I dare say you couldn't even tell me how much a yard you paid for those curtains of yours."

Mrs. Waters shook her head, and smiled feebly; she thought it possible he might be joking.

But Uncle Gilbert was not joking, or, if he was, he kept all the enjoyment of the joke to himself.

"What! you forget that too, do you, ma'am?"

Well then, you may thank your stars that at Chorcombe you will have somebody to advise you in your housekeeping who understands it better than you do. And now I must be off, for my lodgings are at the other end of the town, and I hear those scoundrelly omnibuses charge double fares after eight. How people can put up with such imposition—Dear me, twenty minutes to eight already—no time to lose. Good-bye, Austin, you shall hear from me when I get back to Bristol. Good-bye, ma'am, and look after your bills better in future. Good-bye, young gentleman, and hark you, hadn't you better study for a doctor, as you are so fond of giving advice gratis—he! he! Now then, look sharp with the candle there, or I shall be too late."

Thus speaking, he made his way into the passage, his nephew respectfully following with a light and nervously stammering disjointed protestations of gratitude. These, however, were soon cut short by the old man's impatience; and in a minute more, with a nod and a grunted "good-night," Uncle Gilbert had left the house.

Austin Waters re-entered the little parlor very staidly and quietly—so quietly that nobody could have supposed noisiness to be one of his faults. He had just been promised the reversion of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and yet somehow he did not seem by any means inclined to be in rollicking spirits.

"You must not mind too much what he says," he began deprecatingly as he put down the candle. "He was always very odd and eccentric in his ways."

He looked towards his wife, but she did not answer. She was stooping down to arrange disordered blankets of the empty cradle, and

not notice that she had been addressed. There was an awkward silence, and then Harold spoke, in a low hesitating voice not usual with him.

"You are really going to do as he says, Austin?"

"Certainly; shouldn't I be a monstrous fool if I did any thing else?" returned the master of the house, not without some acrimoniousness. "What! would you have me say no to an offer of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds?"

"Ah! but then, Austin—"

"And let me tell you I was very much annoyed to hear you speak as you did; you might have done me a great injury. But never mind that, so long as you don't worry me about it any more. The idea of wanting a fellow to throw away a fortune of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds when it is to be had for nothing—perfect lunacy it would be, you know. Eh, Agnes, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Waters looked up with a pale anxious face that showed no trace of elation at the magnificence of her prospects.

"Perhaps, dear. But then a hundred a year in the mean time is so very little, and besides—"

"Ah! but a hundred and fifty thousand is not so very little, is it?" argued her husband triumphantly.

"It is a great deal. But then, dear, we do not know how many years—"

"Well, if there is one thing I detest more than another it is that abominable trick of speculating on the chances of other people's lives," interrupted Austin, more crossly than he had yet spoken. "I shouldn't have thought it of you, Agnes, 'pon my word I shouldn't. A poor old man like that, too, who, you may say, has got one foot in the grave already. Didn't you see how thin and shrunk-up he looked? he reminded me of nobody so much as poor Thompson at the office, who was carried off by paralysis at twelve hours' notice. I shouldn't wonder a bit but that in two or three years— Not that I am looking forward to such a thing, of course, all I mean to say is that

it is ridiculous, idiotic nonsense to speak as if I had made a mistake, or to try and talk me into doing any thing different. Besides, it's done now; I've promised, and what I promise I stick to."

He spoke in a raised voice which showed that he was getting seriously out of temper, and looked round with an air of angry decision. Mrs. Waters sighed and said nothing, not because she could not have found something to say had she chosen, but because she remembered that her husband had already quarrelled with his uncle for her sake. Harold also kept silence, and Austin saw that he was to have his own way without further opposition from wife or brother-in-law.

He was not naturally despotic, and softened at once on perceiving their submission.

"Come, come, Agnes, I didn't mean to vex you—you or Harry either. But, as I say, it's done now, and can't be undone, so where's the good of fretting? At the worst it will only be a little pinching for a few years, and then— Oh! you'll be glad enough of it in the end, you'll see. Why, Agnes, cheer up; don't you know I'm doing it for your sake more than my own?—yours and the children's, bless 'em. And you, Harry, my boy, don't you go and think me unkind because I didn't stand up for you more than I did, but if Uncle Gilbert chooses to take dislikes to people for nothing, what's the use of crossing him? It would only have made him fly into a passion and never look at me again, and that wouldn't have been for your good any more than mine. For when I come into my money, Harry, you shall come into it too, you may make up your mind to that. Aha! money won't be such a bad thing then, will it? Ten or twenty thousand pounds needn't be sneezed at even by the future Lord-Chancellor, eh? And that would be nothing out of a hundred and fifty, you know. Oh! you shall see it will all turn out for the best; but indeed you see it already, don't you?"

"Dear Austin!" said the boy. But he did not answer the question.

THE HEIR EXPECTANT.

CHAPTER I.

TIME TRIES ALL.

than twenty-one years had passed since evening on which the Waters family, in the humble parlor of their little Liverpool, had received the unexpected uncle Gilbert.

In the afternoon of a bleak March day, and in the same humble parlor this time, the Waters family sat assembled. The identity of a household must be supposed so long as the husband and father, and here was present not only the father in Waters who had sat at one end of the parlor twenty-one years ago, but the same father who had smiled at him so lovingly from the other end.

But though the husband and wife were the same, all their surroundings were different. The circumstances of their family life were

There was only one fact which, having survived through all these one-and twenty years, might still, might be said to give a kind of continuity to their history during the period; and that fact, however paramount it might be, was the fact of the family's needs and feelings, was, after all, exhausted themselves and their home circle.

GILBERT WAS STILL ALIVE.

Nothing else was changed. There in Liverpool the family circle had comprised a light-hearted school-boy and three rosy-cheeked sturdy sons; here at Chorcombe their sole comfort was a girl who, born about three years after the transplantation of the household, was then about eighteen years of age—Emily, or she was generally called, their daughter.

Emily was a lively child; it was even so. The Austin family and baby Harry who had gladdened the ears of their married life had long ago been laid to rest in Chorcombe church-yard, and within a few weeks of each other by a fever which soon after Emmy's birth had been in the village, especially in damp and cold houses, and more especially when the weather was of such houses were poor and needy. Emily was in the same class, in spite of his relationship to the man of the place, Austin Waters belonged. A family doomed to keep on a hundred a year can not be poor and needy; and even in the direst need, with one child sickening, another, and a scanty exchequer still impoverished by the recent advent of a winter and the slow recovery of the mother—*it is dark hour* Uncle Gilbert could not

be induced to add a farthing to his nephew's allowance. How Austin had got through the troubles of that time at all was a matter of surprise to those best acquainted with his difficulties; still he got through them he did, with that terrible drawback of the loss of all his elder children.

Another member of the household yet remains to be accounted for, the school-boy Harold Maxwell, who not only was never seen in it now, but whose very name was seldom if ever breathed by those to whom it was once so familiar. Under this silence was shrouded one of the heaviest trials that the family had been called upon to suffer, to explain which a few words of retrospective narrative will be necessary.

One day about eighteen years ago—it was just when the husband and wife were at the commencement of their worst troubles, with a baby a few weeks old to provide for, and the elder children down with the fever—the good people of Chorcombe had a great sensation. It was whispered that old Mr. Waters up at the great house had lost some money by a forgery, and that his suspicions pointed to his nephew's brother-in-law as the delinquent.

The rumor of such a charge brought against any one personally known to them in however slight a degree must always produce a stir among the inhabitants of a place like Chorcombe—a large village rather than a town. Harold Maxwell had been but seldom seen there, having passed most of his time during the last three years at Oxford, and never spending at his sister's house more than a day or two of his vacations in consequence of old Mr. Waters's known antipathy to him. Nevertheless the news of the suspicion that had fallen on him travelled through the neighborhood like wild-fire, and before the report was half a day old all the facts of the case had been elicited, so far as they were to be elicited at all, for the benefit of the community at large.

It appeared that a draft bearing the forged name of the elder Mr. Waters had been presented a few days before at a London bank where that gentleman kept an account. The money, to the amount of a hundred pounds, had been paid without question, and the fraud might have escaped detection for an indefinite time, but that the old man had at this juncture taken it into his head to withdraw his deposit from the bank, thus necessitating a balancing of accounts. Immediately on the discovery of the disparity between the bank's reckoning and the depositor's, there had been a brisk interchange of complaint and explanation, and the clerk who had paid it

money on the forged document was sent down to Chorcombe to give a description of the person who had passed it. It was from this description that Gilbert Waters, who had always been violently prejudiced against young Harold from the first day of their acquaintance, had conceived the suspicion which now created such excitement in the neighborhood.

That excitement was greatly increased when it further became known to the Chorcombe gossips that their village was to be the scene of the young man's apprehension and confrontation with the accusing witness. He was daily expected to pass through Chorcombe on his return from a walking-tour in Wales, with which he was occupying a fortnight's holiday that intervened between the conclusion of his University studies and the time appointed for him to enter on the duties of a recently accepted engagement as tutor in a Cornish gentleman's family. As all his books and heavy luggage had been left at his sister's house, where he had paid a flying visit at the beginning of his holiday, it was supposed that he might be confidently looked for; and the people of Chorcombe anticipated his coming with an eager impatience damped only by a lurking doubt (a doubt induced as much by the old man's unpopularity as by their own good-nature) whether he was guilty, after all.

But this doubt quickly began to grow faint when a day or two went by and Harold Maxwell did not arrive. Was it possible he was going to disappoint them? Fainter and fainter waxed the benevolent doubt, and stronger and stronger became the malevolent impatience, as day followed day and still the young man failed to appear. At length all doubt was put an end to, at the same time that impatience was finally balked, by the news that a person answering his description had shortly before been seen in a provincial sea-port, making particular inquiries as to rates of passage and times of departure. Those were before the days of submarine telegraphs, and the bringing back of a suspected criminal when once he had made his escape across the seas was seldom or never thought of.

The fury of Gilbert Waters at the impunity of the forger and thief (for of course flight was tantamount to an avowal of guilt) knew no bounds. For a long time the affair was expected to cost Austin and his family all hope of their promised inheritance, so outrageous was the old man's anger, especially against Mrs. Waters, whom he scrupled not to accuse of having prevented her brother's return by sending him timely warning of his danger. But at last he became gradually mollified, perhaps because his sense of justice was moved by the consideration that, having published his suspicions so widely as he had, he might himself have been the means of bringing them to the delinquent's ears; or perhaps because he felt some gleam of pity for the unfortunate parents who were by this time mourning over the deaths of their children; or perhaps simply because his *amour-propre* was satisfied by the submission made to him in all things by his nephew, including the concession of his claim over the fugitive's books and other effects. However that may have been, certain it was that after a few months the relations of uncle and nephew became pretty much what they had been before; that is to say, Austin's services were put in requi-

sition as often as they could be made available, and the hundred a year was paid in regular quarterly installments. By degrees, also, old Gilbert in his ordinary intercourse with his nephew left off harping on Harold Maxwell and his misdoings, reserving the subject for occasions of extra ill-humor, as one which he had discovered to be specially painful to the younger man's feelings.

It need hardly be said that when Gilbert Waters had thus comparatively forgotten a topic once of such all-absorbing importance to him, it had long ceased to occupy the attention of even the most inveterate of the village gossips. As years passed on, the affair dwindled from the proportions of contemporary history into those of tradition, and at last a generation had sprung up who had scarcely heard of it even in the latter form. By this time there were dwellers in Chorcombe to whom the very name of Harold Maxwell was unknown, and of those that remembered it there were few who could have given an off-hand answer to the question whether he was alive or dead. For of course the subject was not one to be talked of to Mr. and Mrs. Austin Waters, and there were no others in the village who could be supposed to have any accurate information of his fate.

The tale of past sorrow and bereavement, of still enduring anxiety and privation, would have told itself very plainly to any observant spectator present in that little parlor where the Waters family now sat in conclave. A little parlor, and yet as far as possible from being snug—with threadbare carpet, old horsehair chairs whose rusty black was here and there made more conspicuous by a patch of comparatively fresh material, naked-looking walls which a vain attempt had been made to enliven by one or two old-fashioned black-framed prints, a small and struggling fire, and a narrow ill-fitting window which rattled with every new gust that swept the dusty village street without. The scanty and uninviting remains of a frugal dinner were on the table, at one end of which sat Austin Waters, no longer noisy and ruddy and jovial-looking as of yore, but with subdued demeanor, pale face, and grizzled hair, and a gaunt frame on which his clothes seemed to hang loosely and flabbily. Opposite to him sat his wife, on whose dejected bearing and sad anxious countenance the ravages of time and care had written themselves no less distinctly than on his own. She was still mild and ladylike as ever (ladylike in spite of the shabby old-fashioned gown in which she was arrayed, and which was as shabby and old-fashioned as was compatible with the standard of gentility imposed on the family by their tyrant), but her whole manner was pervaded by an air of depression which to any one who had known her in old days must have been very touching.

The third member of the group was the only one who did not bear the external stamp of the family poverty. A fresh round-faced maiden, with dimpled cheeks, full rosy lips, wavy light brown hair that seemed permanently tinged by a gleam of sunshine, and wide-open hazel eyes undimmed by fear or trouble—it was evident that this only child of struggling and care-worn parents had been shielded by their love and self-sacrifice from all the worst evils of their lot. The mother had borne a double share of privation that the daughter's young life might be un-

louded, and the mother's object had been attained. That the girl's spirit was still uncrushed and unbroken was apparent not only in her every look and gesture, but even in the little details of her toilet. She was dressed simply and inexpensively enough in all conscience, in a brown stuff gown that some young ladies might deem it a misfortune to have to wear; but then the gown itself and all the little accessories of collar and cuffs were disposed with a care and elaborateness which showed a mind perfectly at ease, while the arrangement of the wavy light brown hair was so ingenious, and at the same time so becoming, that to a severe critic it might have suggested coquettishness. And, sooth to say, this was a quality which some of Emmy's female friends and neighbors did not stick at attributing to her. But local scandal is always untrustworthy, and as some of the same female friends and neighbors also declared that she wasn't a bit pretty, but on the contrary rather plain than otherwise—an assertion in which they were undeniably more or less mistaken—it may be fairly hoped that one charge was as unfounded as the other.

Whatever of coquettishness there may or may not have been about Emmy under ordinary circumstances, there was certainly none of it in her manner at the present moment. A discussion was going forward in which she evidently took a deep and serious interest, her face being turned towards her father with an air of gravity and ripe wisdom prettily contrasting with its juvenile softness and roundness of outline.

"It may be true or it may not," Austin Waters was saying, "but I tell you I dare not go again to-day. If I were to inquire at the door even, he would be sure to hear of it, and there is no knowing what he might not do. Why, it was only this morning he taunted me with being in a hurry, just for asking if he had had a good night; and if he was to hear that I had been calling again— And besides, I shouldn't wonder if it is a mistake all the time; very likely he is not a bit worse than he was yesterday. When did you say John Thwaites told you?"

"About an hour ago, papa. Mamma and I met him as we were coming back from our walk, and he said he had just heard from Dr. Plummer that Uncle Gilbert was very ill. So I suppose it really must be true that Dr. Plummer said so, for I don't see how Mr. Thwaites or any body else could make a mistake about a thing like that."

The last words were accompanied by a slight, almost imperceptible, toss of the head, which may have been given however only by way of emphasis.

"Very likely Dr. Plummer said so," answered the father, not without a touch of querulousness in his voice. "But then did Dr. Plummer say so after ten o'clock this morning, when I saw Uncle Gilbert with my own eyes, no worse than he has been any time these six months? Any body who didn't know him as well as I do would of course say he was very ill, lying shaking all over with palsy as he does, and so they would have said last week, or last month, or last year, for that matter, but their saying so wouldn't have proved much, you see." And here the touch of querulousness became so audible that the speaker probably noticed it himself, for he went on in somewhat altered tones to inquire: "And it is only John

Thwaites who has told you any thing about this, then?"

"Oh! only John Thwaites," answered the girl lightly, flinging back, as she spoke, one of her long curls with so becoming an air of carelessness and disdain that it was difficult to believe her altogether unconscious of it.

"You might have been a little more careful in getting the particulars out of him, I think," said Austin rather harshly.

"Perhaps we ought, papa," answered Emmy. "But we could not stand talking to him all day," and again the curl was flung back.

He got up, and made a few steps to and fro, manifestly under strong excitement.

"If I only knew what to believe—whether any thing has happened since morning, that is the question. Suppose I go and ask Dr. Plummer—but no, every thing is sure to be reported. I think sometimes he must set spies on me, upon my word and honor I do; he contrives to find out every thing, bedridden as he is. And if I did the least thing to offend him I believe he wouldn't mind disappointing me even now; yes, now, even now, after I have given up all my life to him—that is, if he was offended, you know. Ah! you would think so too if you heard the things he says sometimes."

He shuddered, and paced the room more excitedly than ever, the eyes of his wife and daughter uneasily following him.

"He is always casting it up to me that I never would have taken his hundred a year if I had expected him to live to such an age—he likes talking about that, because he thinks he made such a good bargain. And then he keeps asking if there is any hurry, and if I can make it convenient to wait a year or two longer; and whatever I say to answer him, he only grins and chuckles to himself as if it were the best joke in the world. And once—I never told you this because I tried to forget it—once, when I said something about hoping to wait a great many years longer, he laughed and answered it was a good thing not to be impatient, for who could tell what disappointment might be in store, after all. But then that was only to tease me, I'm sure, eh, Agnes—eh, Emmy? Only to tease me?"

"Oh yes! of course, papa," said Emmy promptly, but Mrs. Waters did not answer.

"Oh yes! of course," he repeated, coming to a stand-still beside his wife's chair. "You think so too, Agnes, don't you?"

"I hope so, dear," she responded tremulously.

He looked at her with strangely-troubled eyes, then said hoarsely:

"You hope so? what do you mean by that? You do not think so, then?"

"I don't know, dear. It is better not to be too confident about any thing."

"You do not think so, then?"

She was silent. For another second or two he stood looking at her as though waiting for an answer, then turned abruptly on his heel, saying sharply:

"You are a fool!"

"Papa, papa!" expostulated Emmy, "how can you talk like that? You dear, dear mamma," she went on, rising to throw both arms round her mother's neck, "don't mind what he says; you know he doesn't mean it. My own sweet mamma, give me a kiss—there."

Mrs. Waters smiled, and kissed her daughter fondly.

It was very pleasant to her to have those soft arms clinging about her, and to feel herself so loved as she knew she was by their owner. And yet, if the truth must be told, in the very warmth of the girl's demonstrations there was a tone of protection which, had Mrs. Waters been less accustomed to it, might have jarred upon her feelings as something like patronage. For the fact was, that Emmy, while loving her mother dearly and tenderly, was half unconsciously disposed to underrate that mother's social importance as compared with her father's. Her father was the nephew and chosen heir of the great man of the village (for penurious as he was, Uncle Gilbert kept up a sort of style which vindicated his claim to lord it over his neighbors), the man whom, if nobody loved, every body respected, and whom Emmy in particular, though no fonder of him than the others, had been brought up to regard as the arbiter of her destinies. Her father therefore, representing the wealth and gentility of the family, shone in her eyes with a reflected glory not shared by her mother, who had no rich relations, and on whom the great man of the village notoriously looked with disfavor. And not only this; her mother might be said in an indirect way to represent the disgrace of the family, inflicted on it long ago by the crime of that dreadful Uncle Harold, whose very name was under such a ban that Emmy might never have heard it but for sundry taunting allusions made by the old man when he was in more than usually bad humor. So, having got the notion into her head that her mother was somehow under a cloud, it was natural that she should allow her fondness to assume something of a protecting tone.

She continued standing by Mrs. Waters's chair, putting forth her neat little hands caressingly to smooth the soft bands of silver-streaked hair over which she bent.

"Not but what I think, mamma dear, you were quite mistaken," she went on glancing up at her father, who still paced the room in angry disquietude. "How you can imagine that Uncle Gilbert could act so dishonorably after all his promises—I know he is very unkind sometimes, but he values his character as a gentleman too much to think of such a thing for a moment, I am sure."

Perhaps it was not every body who would have credited Uncle Gilbert with having the character of a gentleman to value. But he was rich, and it was a weakness of Emmy's to take for granted that all rich people were gentlemen or ladies. And if any are disposed to blame her for this undue worship of wealth, it must be remembered that she had seen wealth worshipped and sacrificed to from her childhood up.

Her father caught eagerly at her words.

"Of course, of course!" he cried, coming once more to a halt. "Why, Agnes, you see, the very child understands about it better than you do. His character as a gentleman—just so. Go on, Emmy, go on. His character as a gentleman."

"Yes, papa, that is my firm opinion," resumed Emmy, not without some sententiousness of manner, for she was gratified by this appreciation of her logic. "Whatever Uncle Gilbert may be, he is too much of a gentleman to break his word

when you have given him no just cause of offense. And so, dear papa, and dear mamma too, you may both make your minds perfectly easy."

She spoke so coaxingly, and with so pretty an air of conviction withal, that her father's brow visibly cleared, and even her mother felt somewhat reassured. Perhaps the girl herself had an idea that she showed to advantage, for she put up her hand to give an adjusting touch to her collar, at the same time glancing across the room at one of the old-fashioned black-framed prints already mentioned, one of which, being covered with glass and hanging in a dark corner, was capable of doing duty on occasion as a substitute for a mirror.

She seemed about to follow up her argument, and might probably have held forth some time longer, when, her eyes having momentarily wandered towards the window, her attention was effectually diverted from the matter in hand.

"There is Uncle Gilbert's man. Is he coming to us, I wonder?"

The question was almost immediately answered by a ring at the bell, and, with a sudden flush of his pale cheeks, Austin Waters hurried into the passage to the street-door. On opening it, he did not stop to ask questions, but, apparently too much agitated to speak, beckoned the newcomer inside, and led the way back to the parlor, where his wife and daughter waited in anxious expectation.

The messenger was a young man of rather rough and rustic appearance for a gentleman's servant (he had been driving pigs three months before), dressed in a suit which did not fit him, and which since it was new had been worn by some half-dozen predecessors in his master's service, for the *personnel* of Uncle Gilbert's household was constantly shifting. There was a brief pause, during which he stood twirling his hat in a way which would have put his employer in a fever of alarm for the nap, and then, finding that every body was waiting for him to speak, he blurted out:

"If you please, master, the old master wants to see you d'rectly. He's bin took worse, and doctor says as how he must go off this time."

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Waters spoke. The news which they had expected for so many years, and had thought to hear long ere this, had taken them by surprise, now that it had really come. Both husband and wife were deadly pale, and the former was trembling violently. The silence was at last broken by Emmy.

"He is very ill, then? How did it come on? how long ago? It must have been very sudden."

"It wur about twelve o'clock, miss, 'cause just afore he'd been going on at Mrs. Muggridge for being late with his beef-tea; we thought he'd ha' bin out of bed a'most in his tantrums. So she got it ready in double-quick time, but when she brought it, and he tried to sit up to take it, he couldn't, and then he tried to speak, and couldn't speak plain. We see'd d'rectly it wur another stroke, and Mrs. Muggridge she wur for sending at once to tell you, but he kep' shaking his head and trying to say as plain as he could he'd be better soon. He wur'n't even for seeing the doctor, and wouldn't only we fetched him unbeknown, and he couldn't help hisself. Well, doctor he pulled a long face, and said it wur a bad

job, but master he answered very cross he wur agoing to get well, for all that, and wouldn't hear of us telling you nor nobody else. Howsomer, he has kep' on getting deader and deader all up his side, and as cold as a lump o' lead, and doctor he called again just now, and said it wur a worsen job nor he thought, and wouldn't it be better to send for Mr. Austin, and master he seemed to understand it wur all up, for he said yes and let him be quick about it, and then he went into a doze and doctor thinks p'raps he'll go off so."

Having delivered himself thus with some difficulty and with great detriment to his hat, which he kept twirling about all the time as an aid to his eloquence, the narrator came to a full stop, glad to have done his part.

"Poor Uncle Gilbert! how very sad!" sighed Emmy.

And though some people might have thought the sigh hypocritical under the circumstances, it was probably quite genuine. Emmy had not suffered from Uncle Gilbert as her father and mother had suffered, and could afford to compassionate him at this supreme crisis.

Austin Waters suddenly roused himself; Emmy's remark seemed to remind him of something he had forgotten.

"Ah! very sad," he echoed, but it was in a husky constrained voice quite different from Emmy's. "Poor Uncle Gilbert, I am afraid—Give me my hat, child, there. Now then, my good fellow, I am quite ready."

And in another moment Austin Waters was out of the house and on his way to the old man's bedside, leaving his wife and daughter to await in uneasy suspense what news he might bring back. Would he or would he not return as Uncle Gilbert's heir?

CHAPTER II.

VISITORS.

THE mother and daughter, thus left alone, sat for some time without speaking. At last Emmy raised her bright eyes from the floor, and turned them towards her mother with an inquiring look rather at variance with the confidence which she immediately went on to express:

"It will all come right, mamma; I am sure it will."

"God grant that it may, my darling. If it does not, I don't know what will become of us."

Emmy sat looking before her very thoughtfully. Presently, without raising her eyes this time, she resumed hesitatingly:

"I shouldn't be nervous about it for a moment, only Uncle Gilbert is so very strict and severe, and I am afraid he is prejudiced against us about—on account of—that affair with—because of—of Uncle Harold, you know."

She sunk her voice as she came to the forbidden name, and glanced deprecatingly at her mother, as though almost fearing the effect of words which were so unfamiliar that it was a sort of experiment to utter them. Mrs. Waters had turned a shade paler, and for a minute her breath seemed to come and go more quickly than usual; but when at last she spoke it was with such composure that Emmy felt relieved of half her timidity.

"I dare say you are right, Emmy."

"Yes, he thinks of it still sometimes, I am sure, and that is the only thing that frightens me," continued the girl, speaking with more rapidity, now that the ice was broken. "If he should take it into his head to visit upon us—Ah! how cruel and unjust it would be, and yet I am almost afraid sometimes. It is very hard. Just as if any body could help having bad relations; just as if it was papa's fault, or yours, or mine, to have a wicked person connected—"

"Emmy!" cried her mother.

Emmy had been growing warmer and warmer in her subject, but the tone of mingled appeal and command in which she was addressed brought her instantly to a stop. Her mother's face wore an expression of positive suffering.

"Remember it is my brother you are speaking of," said Mrs. Waters faintly, as their eyes met.

"I am so sorry, mamma," faltered Emmy. "But after all these years I did not think you cared—"

"It is my brother," repeated Mrs. Waters.

Emmy dropped her eyes penitently and did not answer. She was vexed with herself for having given her mother pain, and perhaps a little vexed with her mother also for being so easily put to pain. For Emmy had never known what it was to have a brother or sister of her own, and secretly thought it very strange that her mamma should be capable of feeling any remnant of regard for a person who had caused such disgrace and misfortune to his family as had been wrought by Harold Maxwell.

For some time she sat silent, pondering on what appeared to her so curious an anomaly in her mother's character. From this her thoughts gradually wandered to other, though kindred, topics of speculation, in which at last she got so interested that, very timidly and cautiously, she ventured upon another remark.

"I suppose you don't know any thing about Uncle Harold now, mamma?"

Such an inquiry surely argued Emmy to be in a more than usually suspicious mood, seeing that, only a few weeks before, she had heard old Gilbert Waters put the same question to her father and receive a solemn assurance in the negative.

These repeated references to her brother were evidently very painful to Mrs. Waters.

"Know any thing of him!" she answered in some agitation, "what should we know of him? Emmy, what are you thinking of, what—"

"Oh! it was very ridiculous of me, certainly," assented Emmy, suddenly struck by the absurdity of the question. "I only just asked for curiosity, for of course I knew already it was quite impossible—indeed I heard papa say so only the other day. I wonder how Uncle Gilbert is."

And thus the subject of Harold Maxwell was dropped for the present. Not that Emmy could not have found plenty more to say about it, but the theme was one on which she had from childhood been accustomed to restrain her curiosity, some of the worst scoldings she had ever incurred having been provoked from her father by attempts to find out something concerning this unknown uncle of hers.

The conversation fell back on the old dreary topic of Gilbert Waters and the confidence which was or was not to be placed in his good fair

when a brisk knock sounding at the street-door caused the girl to start up with an exclamation that was almost joyful.

"Miss Egerton! I know her knock."

And with eager alacrity Emmy ran out to open the door.

"Why, Emmy!" said a clear ringing voice.

"Oh! Miss Egerton, it is such a comfort to see you! Come and speak to mamma."

With these words Emmy ushered in the newcomer, who, going straight up to Mrs. Waters, gave her a hearty kiss.

"Dear Mrs. Waters! Now for goodness' sake keep up your spirits, or I shall run away again directly."

Mrs. Waters looked up and smiled, half comforted already. There was something so fresh and cordial in the speaker's voice and manner that her presence in that gloomy household had something of the effect of a breeze of morning air let into a sick-chamber.

The visitor was a young lady who might safely be called graceful, for her figure was tall and well-formed, and moreover characterized by a certain undulating elegance of movement that gave an air of ease to all she did. That she could correctly be styled beautiful, or even pretty, was not quite so self-evident, and perhaps it would not have occurred to any body seeing her for the first time to think so. Probably, however, this was not so much the fault of her features as of her complexion, which, though perfectly clear and smooth, was as dark as a brunette's, while it lacked, except on rare occasions of excitement, the ordinary brunette's richness of color. On those rare occasions she would perhaps have commanded admiration even at first sight, for her features were for the most part good and sufficiently regular, and her face was always lighted up by a pair of large gray eyes which, contrasting strikingly with her almost black hair and long dark eyelashes, would under any circumstances have redeemed her appearance from the charge of commonplace. She has been called a young lady, but she was some years past her first youth, being now some five or six-and-twenty years of age.

"It was so kind of you to come," said Mrs. Waters gratefully. "Have you heard—"

"Of old Mr. Waters being so ill—oh yes! I have been shopping in the village, and heard all about it; that is why I am here. I thought you might like to see a friend."

"Dear Miss Egerton," said Emmy, "you are always so good. Won't you take a chair? And do let me put down your umbrella."

As Emmy hovered about the visitor with these little offers of service, the most casual observer might have seen that she was actuated by very sincere liking and affection. Yet it might also have been noticed that with liking and affection there was mingled a certain deference which to those who best knew her would have suggested that Miss Egerton must be a person of considerable consequence in the world.

And indeed in the little world of Chorcombe Miss Egerton was a person of very great consequence, being neither more nor less than the largest landed proprietor in the neighborhood. All that great estate lying a little way westward of Chorcombe, and known as Egerton Park, was hers to dispose of as she would; so that if Uncle Gilbert by virtue of his wealth was the great

man of the village, Miss Egerton, by virtue of wealth and social importance combined, was the great lady of the whole district, a position which she had occupied during the past three years. Only during three years, for she had not been born to her present dignities or even brought up to expect them, and this circumstance was generally held to account for sundry peculiarities in her modes of life and thinking which had procured her with some people a character for eccentricity, and certainly distinguished her from most young ladies moving in county society.

And here a glance at Miss Egerton's antecedents will not be out of place.

She was the only child of a younger son of the Egerton family, who, having irrevocably offended his relations by marrying a penniless governess and dying when his daughter was still in early youth, had left her with hardly any other resource for her maintenance and that of an invalid mother than what a good education and her own industry might supply. At the age of sixteen Olivia Egerton was supporting herself and contributing to the support of her mother, by teaching from morning to night in a boarding-school; and a boarding-school teacher she continued to be for years without assistance or recognition from any of her father's relations, who for the rest were scarcely aware of her existence. At last, some years after she had been left alone in the world by the loss of her mother, the startling intelligence reached her through the family lawyer that the stumble of a horse in the hunting-field and the consequent death of an unknown cousin had made her mistress of Egerton Park and some ten thousand a year in rents. The intelligence was very startling, for at Clare Court, about ten miles from Chorcombe, lived another branch of the family, which, though younger than that represented by Olivia, had always kept up friendly relations at Egerton Park, so that neither Olivia nor any one else had doubted that the property would be bequeathed to the Clare Court people in the failure of direct heirs. And so it unquestionably would have been if the last owner had troubled himself to bequeath it to any body, but he had been a young man, full of life, and thinking rather of marriage than of death, besides which, the existence of Olivia was so utterly ignored and forgotten that the possibility of her heiress-ship had never been so much as taken into account. Thus it came to pass that, aided by her very obscurity and insignificance, the boarding-school teacher suddenly found herself metamorphosed into a great county magnate.

She was considered to bear her honors very well, on the whole, though, as has been said, there were sundry peculiarities about her which were thought to need apology. For instance, it is undoubtedly a great peculiarity in a wealthy heiress to go on living with nobody but a paid lady-companion of middle age, when she might choose a husband among half the handsome young men of the county; and Olivia, though mixing much in society, and even entering into its enjoyments with apparent zest, had set her face steadily against all the admirers and would-be suitors by whom she was beleaguered. Then again she was a little more frank and free-spoken in her manners, a little more independent and self-helpful in her ways, than was quite consistent with the standard of propriety prescribed by provincial

chaperons. She was more often seen on foot than in her carriage, more often alone than with her companion, and delighted in taking long rambles up hill and down dale without regard to dust or mud. It was in the course of these solitary walks that soon after her first arrival in the neighborhood she had gradually made the acquaintance of Mrs. Waters and Emmy, first passing them with a friendly nod, then stopping to say good day, and at last engaging them in long confidential chats. She had taken a great fancy to Emmy at a very early period of their friendship, and, sorry to see the girl's education neglected—as in the circumstances of her parents it necessarily was, so far at least as accomplishments were concerned—had offered to send her to school at her own expense. But much as Mr. and Mrs. Waters might have liked to close with this proposal, they dared not listen to it for a moment, knowing that old Gilbert would have furiously resented their acceptance of what he would have considered charity from a stranger. It was therefore ultimately settled that Emmy should go pretty frequently up to Egerton House to let Miss Egerton hear her play and to sketch the park trees; the practical meaning of this being that Miss Egerton constituted herself Emmy's unpaid teacher in music and drawing. For nearly three years this arrangement had continued in full force, and Emmy, having been an apt pupil, was now fairly proficient in both accomplishments. She had really therefore some reason to regard Miss Egerton as a friend to be loved, no less than as a great lady to be looked up to.

"You are a good child, Emmy," said the visitor, smiling kindly at the neat little figure that fluttered about her. "You are always glad to see me, I know, though I do make such a fuss about perspective."

"Oh yes! indeed I am always glad, Miss Egerton. And to-day especially; papa is gone to Uncle Gilbert's, and we are so dull and miserable, you can't think. And then mamma is making herself so dreadfully anxious and unhappy; we needed somebody to come and argue her out of it."

"I am ready to argue to any extent, my dear, but you must give me my subject first. What is your mamma making herself so anxious about?"

"She is afraid of Uncle Gilbert's breaking his word and leaving his money to somebody else," answered Emmy, looking slightly shame-faced.

"Oh! dear Miss Egerton, we are not mercenary, but after all we have gone through we can't help thinking about it. Only, as I tell her, he never could be so dishonorable, could he now, could he? So it is quite absurd to frighten ourselves, eh?"

"It is always quite absurd to frighten one's self about money, Emmy. It makes uncommonly little real difference."

"No, but seriously—" began Emmy.

"Seriously, my dear Emmy, and seriously, my dear Mrs. Waters—I never was more in earnest in my life. You wish for this money yourselves, and therefore I wish it for you, but I seriously think it quite possible that you might be better without it than with it."

"Oh! Miss Egerton!" remonstrated Emmy.

"If we had only enough to live on—" faltered Mrs. Waters.

"Yes, enough, that would be best, of course;

but when the question is between too much and too little, I am not at all sure that too little has the worst of it; and mind, I ought to know, for I've tried both. When I had too little, I had to work hard to make, and now that I have too much I have to work hard to spend, that's all. No, that is not quite all either; when people were kind to me then, I knew they meant it, but when they are kind to me now, I am pretty sure they are only thinking of my money. Ah! Emmy, child, if you are afraid of disappointment, let it be a comfort to you to think that then, at all events, your friends really would be your friends."

But Emmy was not to be comforted so easily in view of the dread contingency which Miss Egerton seemed to contemplate, and only shook her head dolefully.

"Ah! if I could only know that of my friends!" went on Miss Egerton—and here there was a touch of bitterness in the clear ringing voice not natural to it. "I know it of you and your mother, I am sure I do; but I believe that out of this room there is not a creature in the world that cares a straw about me apart from my rents and banker's book. And yet so many dear friends as I have—oh! you would hardly credit how many there are, and what pretty things they say: if I thought such things could be said to me for my own sake I should be in a seventh heaven of delight and self-complacency. But then, unfortunately, I know that money is very attractive, and I am also quite aware that I myself am not attractive in the least."

She made a little break, and looked at her hearers as though expecting them to say something in the way of polite acquiescence, or possibly of still more polite contradiction. But though they might very well have taken the opportunity of putting in a compliment if they had chosen, and this without by any means compromising their veracity, they were so much engrossed in their own anxieties that they never thought of answering a word. So, after waiting an instant, Miss Egerton went on again with a slight sigh.

"Yes, you see that is all the good my money has done me—to make me despise the world and its professions. But, never mind, Emmy, that needn't be your case, you know; you have found out already that it is quite possible for people to like you for your own sake. Ah! you may think yourself a lucky girl, for if ever there was a truer, honestest, manlier young fellow than that John Thwaites—"

"John Thwaites, indeed!" said Emmy, tossing her head with superb disdain, but at the same time turning very red. "The idea of that creature John Thwaites—"

"No now, Emmy, whatever you do, don't despise him. If you can't like him as well as he likes you, you can't, and there is an end of it; though it is my private opinion—but never mind, I dare say I should only get a scolding for saying what my private opinion is. Only, whatever you do, don't give yourself airs, and pretend to look down on him—not even if Uncle Gilbert leaves you every penny of his money—for he doesn't deserve it. No, take the advice of an old woman, for you know I am an old woman compared to you—"

Here there was another little break, which might have given Emmy an opportunity of

ting in a word, but she was too much occupied in a pouting examination of the hem of her pocket-handkerchief to attend to any thing else, and Miss Egerton resumed:

"Take the advice of an old woman, and be thankful that you have been able to win an honest man's love without money to help you. For he loves you with all his heart, Emmy, I am sure; and oh! when you think of that, how fortunate you may count yourself, and how little you need care for the paltry money that Uncle Gilbert may or may not leave you!"

Emmy was as red as fire by this time, but kept examining her handkerchief so persistently that hardly any thing of her face could be seen. She did not speak for some time after Miss Egerton had finished, but at last, finding that an answer was expected, she managed to bring out a few words, with a careful avoidance, however, of John Thwaites.

"You seem to make quite sure that we are going to be disappointed, Miss Egerton."

"I can not be quite sure, dear. But I want to make you feel that it is not of so much consequence as you appear to think."

"Not of consequence! What! when perhaps we are going to be left without a farthing in the world!"

"That is the dreadful part of it," said Mrs. Waters mournfully. "It is not because I want to be so very rich, I am sure; but when I think how destitute and helpless—and the blow too that it would be to my poor husband— Oh! don't despise me, but indeed I can not help it."

She covered her face with her hands, unable to restrain her tears at the picture of desolation which her fancy had conjured up. Miss Egerton sat looking at her very tenderly, then rose somewhat abruptly, exclaiming:

"What a Job's comforter I am, to be sure! it is high time you were rid of me. Dear Mrs. Waters, I beg a thousand pardons; I wanted to prepare you for the worst, and I have done it a great deal more effectually than I intended. Now good-bye, and let us think of nothing but the best, only if the worst should really come, remember" (here she lowered her voice, and, approaching Mrs. Waters to take leave, spoke the words almost into her ear), "remember I am what they call rich, and I would as soon be poor if my best friends won't let me be of a little use to them. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

With these words, and a kiss warmly impressed on the poor lady's cheek, Miss Egerton turned to go, followed into the little passage by Emmy, who, in spite of the lecture about John Thwaites, hung about the visitor as affectionately as ever, and parted from her with evident reluctance.

"Good-bye, dear Miss Egerton. How we are ever to thank you for all your kindness—"

"Oh! nonsense, child, don't speak about that. There, kiss me and let me go—but stop a moment first; promise me you will think a little of what I have said about poor John Thwaites."

"Oh! as for that," said Emmy, shaking her curls, "really—" Here she opened the door with a great clatter which caused her remaining words, if any, to be lost.

"Oh! you want me to go, now that I have begun again on John Thwaites, do you! Well, I'll please you, child, and I think you'll try to please me a little too, especially as I believe it will

be pleasing yourself into the bargain. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Emmy with very hot cheeks, but not otherwise taking any notice of what had gone before, and even forcing herself, in spite of her hot cheeks, to stand at the door just as usual to look after Miss Egerton as she passed through the tiny ten-foot-square garden and up the village street.

But hardly had Miss Egerton got twenty yards beyond the garden-gate, when, turning hastily out of a side-street, there almost knocked against her a young man, who, having received from the heiress in passing a particularly friendly nod, immediately afterwards caught sight of Emmy and came hurrying towards where she stood.

Emmy gave another shake to her curls as though gathering confidence for an encounter, and then, scorning retreat, set herself to await the young man's approach with the most perfect appearance of unconcern that she could summon up under the circumstances. It must be admitted that her position was one of considerable embarrassment, for she was standing on the doorstep in full view of any body who might be passing in the street, and the person now coming towards her was no other than that creature John Thwaites.

A word here about this John Thwaites. He was clerk in a large paper-mill near Chorcombe, where he had consequently come to live a year or two before. It happened that where he lodged he was a near neighbor of Mr. and Mrs. Waters, and near neighbors in a place like Chorcombe always get to know each other more or less. By this time he had formed a tolerably intimate friendship with the family, and, as has been shown, was suspected of feeling a good deal more than friendship for one member of it. For the rest, he was a personable young fellow enough, with well-knit figure of middle size, open good-natured face, which was marred in spite of fresh complexion and fair hair, round honest-looking blue eyes, and a frank straightforward manner, only marred occasionally in the presence of ladies, and especially in the presence of Emmy, by a little too much of shyness.

In his fear lest Emmy should re-enter the house without waiting for him, he came up so quickly that he was quite out of breath as he swung open the garden-gate.

"Miss Waters!" he cried, panting.

By this time, except for her cheeks, Emmy was as cool as could be desired.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites!" she said, with a careless elevation of the eyebrows as though she had only just become aware that such a person existed.

"I—I beg your pardon. But—but I thought that you might like to know—that you ought to know, that is— Since I saw you this morning I have been making inquiries, and I find it is quite true about old Mr. Waters. In fact, I took the liberty of calling at Dr. Plummer's on purpose, and they told me he must be in great danger, for Dr. Plummer had been over to see him again, and was there now. So as I thought perhaps your father didn't know, I came running all the way—"

"You are very kind," answered Emmy, with a little bow. "But papa was sent for some time ago, thank you."

"Oh!" said the young man, looking a little crestfallen to find that he had been of no use, after all.

"Yes," said Emmy, smoothing down a refractory fold in a dandy little apron that she wore. "What a windy day this is!"

"Yes, rather—very much so. I am afraid I am keeping you in the cold, Miss Waters."

"It is rather cold, certainly," acquiesced Emmy. "I suppose you don't want to see mamma?"

"N—no, thank you," said poor John, rather reluctantly, for in truth there was nothing he would have liked better than to be asked to enter. "I—I hope I have not kept you in the cold."

"Oh! don't mention it, Mr. Thwaites."

"Thank you. Then I will say good-bye, Miss Waters."

"Good-bye," said Emmy, looking very hard at some pigeons that were circling round the chimney-tops of the opposite houses—so hard that for a second or two she did not see the hand which the young man ventured timidly to extend. She saw it at last, and of course had to put out her hand too—what could she have done else?"

"Good-bye," he said, taking her hand. He looked at her for an instant, and then—apparently forgetting to let her hand go, for he still held it—added: "I suppose things will be very different when I see you next, Miss Emmy. Your father will be a rich man, and you will be a great lady."

"I don't know about that," answered Emmy, making a slight effort to liberate herself, which, however, the stupid creature did not seem so much as conscious of. "Some people think that perhaps Uncle Gilbert may forget us altogether, but of course I can't tell."

"Of course not, Miss Emmy. Well, I can only say I wish you every good fortune."

"Thank you," said Emmy, making another and more vigorous effort to get back her hand (for what could the people over the way be thinking?). It was, however, still held fast.

"But—but—I hope you won't be angry with me for saying so—if it should turn out different—it would be very selfish of me, of course—but—but if it did, I should be—in fact I should be glad rather than sorry. You know what I mean."

Having taken heart to say thus much, he took heart also to give her hand a great squeeze, and then, dismayed at his own audacity, turned away without waiting for an answer, and posted down the village street so rapidly that he almost seemed to be in flight.

Emmy got into the house and shut the door as quickly as she could. But she did not go immediately back to her mother, stopping a minute or two in the dark passage to arrange her apron and adjust her curls, and otherwise recover from the flutter into which the young man's affrontery had thrown her.

"The idea!" she murmured poutingly to herself, as she recalled the atrocity of his parting words.

But even as she thought of them she found the pout relaxing into a smile in spite of herself. She could not help feeling that, after all, the loss of Uncle Gilbert's money might not be so very dreadful.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLARE COURT COUSIN.

MEANWHILE Miss Egerton was making the best of her way home. As she went up the quaint little village street her progress was a good deal impeded by the necessity of returning the salutations which, as a great potentate of the neighborhood, she received from almost every one she met; but soon the houses began to be less and less thickly set, and her attention was gradually relieved from this strain. At last, having passed a few outlying cottages and farm-buildings, she found herself in a country road bordered only by leafless trees and hedges through which constant glimpses were to be had of the fields beyond, and accelerating her pace, she pushed briskly forward, with evident pleasure in the keen March wind that whistled about her, if not exactly in the dust with which it came accompanied. So much was she absorbed in enjoyment of her walk that she scarcely noticed a clatter of horse-hoofs which presently sounded behind her, and was quite startled on hearing a voice say:

"Why, Olivia!"

She turned her head, so much surprised that it was a moment before she recognized in the well-mounted rider who had just reined up at her side her cousin, the son and heir of the Egertons at Clare Court.

"Dear me! is that you? How do you do, Randal?"

"I was just coming over to see you," he said, bending from his horse to shake hands. "I am so glad not to have missed you. You will allow me the honor of escorting you home?"

"There is no occasion to trouble you or your horse to keep pace with me," said the young lady. "Ride on to my house; you will not have to wait long."

"Ah! but I intend to have the pleasure of walking with you," was the gallant reply. "Here, James," he continued, addressing a servant who just then rode up, "look after Viscount."

"Oh! pray do not trouble yourself; I can walk home by myself quite well."

"I would not lose such an opportunity for the world," answered the cavalier, and proceeded to dismount without allowing time for further remonstrance.

It will be seen from this meeting of the cousins that the family at Clare Court had been magnanimous enough to take their humble relative into favor since her promotion to Egerton Park, in spite of the disappointment which her heiressship had inflicted upon themselves. Very magnanimous such conduct surely was, for the Clare Court property was not only much smaller than the Egerton Park estate, but was said to be heavily mortgaged; so that, for people with a position in the county to keep up and a large family of daughters to portion off, the loss of such an inheritance as had fallen to their obscure cousin was no light misfortune. Indeed there were not wanting scandal-mongers who whispered that they could not have reconciled themselves to the calamity with so good a grace but for the hope of retrieving it by a match between the new mistress of Egerton Park and their son Randal—a suspicion confirmed by the assiduity of the young man's attentions to the heiress on all public occasions. How far the heiress was disposed

encourage these attentions was another question, answered differently in different quarters. On the one hand, it was certain that Randal, with his tall military-looking figure, fine dark eyes, and black silken beard and mustache, had every thing to insure his success with any ordinary young lady whom he might set himself to fascinate, especially a young lady whom he had the advantage of being able to approach on terms of cousinly intimacy. But then, on the other hand, it was equally certain that Miss Egerton, if indeed he had any such view with regard to her, was not an ordinary young lady at all.

In another moment Randal had joined his cousin on the foot-path, while the servant trotted on with the two horses, to lead the way at a discreet distance in front.

"Pray take my arm, Olivia," was his first overture.

"You are very kind," said Olivia, "but really I think I can manage better by myself. How are Mr. and Mrs. Egerton?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Egerton!" echoed the young man petulantly. "Good heavens, Olivia! what a cold artificial way of speaking! Can't you call them uncle and aunt?"

"I am sure I beg your pardon; I am always forgetting. But you see it is so lately that I have had an opportunity of calling them any thing at all—it is only natural I should make mistakes sometimes."

Randal slightly colored and did not answer, so Olivia went on:

"And your sisters, I hope they are all quite well, and caught no cold at Mrs. Wrentmore's ball? By-the-way, what a pleasant evening that was!"

"Very pleasant indeed." He paused as though for reflection; then drew a long sigh and added: "You seemed to enjoy it very much, at all events, with such a lot of fellows as there were dangling about you. I scarcely got near you all evening."

"Oh! Randal, how can you say so? I danced with you twice, and really I think that ought to satisfy you."

"Satisfy me!" he grumbled. "What! and you talking and laughing all evening with a pack of coxcombical toadies and fortune-hunters who can no more appreciate you—"

"Stop a minute, Randal. If you are kind enough to be afraid of my head being turned by the nonsense of those coxcombical toadies and fortune-hunters as you call them, I am much obliged to you, but you may set your mind entirely at rest. I am not taken in by a single one of all their compliments, and am perfectly aware that but for my money I am as plain and unattractive a person as ever set foot in a ball-room."

He started in scandalized horror.

"Plain! unattractive! you—Olivia! Ah! if you could only look into my heart, and see the impression— Why, you are all beauty and attractiveness together; you are all— Now, Olivia, what are you angry at?"

He saw her looking at him with cold eyes and curling lip, and wondered how he could possibly have offended her. The fact was, she was thinking how differently the same proposition which he had met with such extravagant contradiction had been received a while ago when made in the presence of real and disinterested friends.

"Angry! I am not angry in the least—how could I be angry with such a pretty speech? All beauty and attractiveness together—how delightful! and yet, made up of such commonplace materials as I am, it is rather strange too. Let me see, I must be something like my namesake in 'Twelfth Night,' I suppose, for I really think I possess all her perfections—item, two lips indifferent red; item, two eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin—dear me, how gratifying!"

Randal pulled his long whiskers with a puzzled air; he was not very deeply read, and had not the slightest idea what she was talking about.

"Well, so you might be gratified if you knew how people admire you—really and truly admire you, I mean. And, by Jove! it would be odd if they didn't, for wherever you go there isn't a girl fit to hold a candle to you, in looks or any thing else, of course."

"What! you really think so, Randal? Why, then those nice young men were not flattering after all—I must consider the matter seriously. Which should you say was the most eligible?—Colonel Crawford, or Captain Fane, or Mr. Neville, or Mr.—"

"Olivia, Olivia, do you want to drive me mad? A set of fawning wretches like those—do you think they can possibly care for any thing but your money; do you imagine—"

Olivia turned her face full upon him.

"Dear me! this is very odd. You tell me in one breath that I am all beauty and attractiveness, the loveliest creature in the room on all occasions; and in the next you say that it is utterly impossible for Colonel Crawford, or Captain Fane, or Mr. Neville, or Mr. any body else to care for any thing about me but my money. What am I to believe?"

The young man bit his lip; he was wont rather to pique himself on his wit, but somehow with Olivia he always felt that he was made to look like a fool.

"Come now, Olivia, it isn't fair just because you are so clever—"

"Oh! it is to be clever instead of beautiful now, is it?"

"Clever and beautiful too, you know you are. The cleverest and most beautiful girl in the county, come."

"You do me great honor, Mr. Egerton."

"Mr. Egerton! There you go again! So cold and unkind as it sounds. I'm sure I always call you by your Christian name."

"I can't deny that," said Olivia.

"Well, it's only right between relations, isn't it? I declare I think sometimes you forget all about our being cousins."

"I am always quite ready to treat you as a cousin," she answered, but there was a slight emphasis on the last word which seemed as though she wished to limit the construction that he might place on the admission.

"But never as any thing else, you mean?" he said bitterly.

"That is what I meant, certainly."

"Olivia, this is cruel. If you knew with what emotions I sought you to-day, with what a full heart—"

"Now pray, Randal, don't begin with that again."

"What! you won't even listen! I have come

niles on purpose to declare my feelings, top me before I begin to speak." "Is the use of your speaking when we are the answer beforehand?" "You might at least hear me; you might have a chance—" "There is no chance whatever—absolutely

!" He walked moodily on for a second ten, switching with his riding-whip at the end of the hedgerow, resumed with a pro-lancholy air: "I trust you will let me hope that some day I shall find your heart less—" "I need not hope for any thing that has to do with my heart. Old maids have no hearts, and there was a confirmed old maid in the family once."

Olivia! To talk like that, with your good accomplishments—" "I am, as a favor I beg that this subject be dropped."

He spoke so seriously that he was afraid to further for the present, and merely drew a long sigh.

He had now reached a curiously carved old gateway which was one of the approaches to Park, and Olivia stopped to undo the latch. Randal did not seem inclined to enter, but his hand to say good-bye.

"I won't you come in?" said Olivia. "I won't," he answered gloomily. "You must not speak of what I came to speak of. I am not capable at present of talking of anything else."

"Whenever you do find yourself capable of saying something else, I can only say that I shall always find it a welcome."

"Another time," he murmured, "when I am stronger—"

"At other time I shall be most happy to say so now good-bye."

"Good-bye," answered Randal in low sad accents, beckoned to his servant, who had stationed himself with the horses at a little distance from the gate. In a minute more the rejected lover was again in the saddle, riding disconsolably in the direction of Clare Court, and

there ever such obstinacy? What have I—have—a title, I suppose, but I fancy myself out there; rich lords don't let me go cheap, and I think she is too long to take a bankrupt one. Did I make any wonder—I tried to lay it on thick goodness knows, but some women are so wise— Well, I have failed again, but I will some day—I am more determined

Confound it, there's something about her commonly—not that she's exactly prettier, but there's a sort of piquancy and wit about her—and then, considering how expropriation would suit— Provoking creature! I'll bring her to book yet, see if I

He had been less sanguine of success if he had seen the smile, half of contempt, half of tenderness, with which Olivia looked after him as he rode away—a smile which still played upon her lips as she walked up the avenue to the house which had not quite faded even when she was herself in her own chamber.

"All beauty and attractiveness together. How they all sing to the same tune, and what a fool they must take me for!"

She cast her eyes disdainfully towards her mirror, but somehow did not so disdainfully withdraw from them, and indeed for a little while did not withdraw from them at all. For to her surprise the face she found there, all flushed with fresh air and excitement, was one which unaccountably struck her for the first moment as almost beautiful.

But she had long ago settled in her own mind that she was not and could not be a beauty, and presently turned away with a shake of the head and something that sounded like a sigh.

CHAPTER IV.

WAITING FOR THE END.

A LARGE chamber of handsome dimensions, but made dreary-looking by dingy dark-colored paper, gaunt dusty hangings, and above all by a spectral four-post bedstead which constituted its principal piece of furniture—doubly dreary-looking just now in the gray light of the bleak March sky that showed dimly through the drawn blinds—such was the room into which Austin Waters on arriving at his uncle's house found himself ushered.

He was in a state of excited bewilderment which made him feel almost as one in a dream, but through the confusion of his senses he perceived on entering two persons in the room both of whom he ought to know. One of these, sitting at the foot of the bed making entries in a note-book, was a large heavy-looking man of formidable countenance and demeanor, who was familiar to him as Dr. Plummer, the chief physician of the neighborhood; the other, just then in the act of giving an adjusting touch to the pillows, was a fat red-faced old woman, whom he recognized as Mrs. Muggridge, the last new housekeeper. He was also aware of something that lay beneath the bed-clothes, shaping them into a long narrow heap not unlike a mound in a church-yard, and knew that he stood in the presence of Uncle Gilbert.

He made a few wavering steps towards the bed, and presently found somebody shaking his hand. It was Dr. Plummer, who had politely risen to receive him.

"A most melancholy occasion, Mr. Austin," said the doctor in a low oily whisper. "Ah! I am afraid it must be very near the last."

Austin Waters looked at the motionless heap before him—motionless save for an occasional slight twitching movement—but could make no response.

"Ah! very sad," commented the doctor.

"Poor dear!" sighed Mrs. Muggridge, not because she was particularly fond of a master in whose service she was comparatively a stranger, but because she felt that something was demanded of her by the proprieties of the occasion.

Austin began to feel that something was demanded of him too, and, making a great effort, stammered out:

"Is—there no hope?"

His voice sounded so strange to him that he could hardly recognize it as his own. But apparently there were other ears that did recognize

it, for no sooner had he spoken than something stirred among the bed-clothes, and another voice (so thick and husky it was!) said:

"Austin!"

He had so little expected to be thus accosted that he shook from head to foot, and could hardly control himself sufficiently to answer:

"Yes, Uncle Gilbert."

"Come here," said the thick husky voice, and a face was raised from the pillow—a yellow, furrowed, distorted face ghastly to see, and more ghastly still because to the distortion of paralysis there now seemed to be added the distortion of an attempted smile. For a minute Austin found a pair of bleared half-glazed eyes staring at him, then heard the same voice say, issuing laboriously from dry slow-moving lips: "Long-looked-for comes at last, you see."

Austin could not at once reply, and the dry lips had time to articulate:

"What's the matter? Are you ill too?"

He felt that it was necessary to answer, and compelled himself to falter forth humbly:

"I am so sorry, uncle, so anxious—"

He was interrupted by a gasping guttural sound which he presently saw was intended for a chuckle.

"Anxious about the will, eh? Oh! I've not forgotten it."

The words were accompanied with what seemed to Austin so demoniacal a grin that he remained silent perforce.

"It is there—the cabinet in the corner—" went on the old man, speaking with increased difficulty and pointing with a lean, shrivelled hand in which a little life was still left. "Top drawer—key under pillow—just here—Aha! wouldn't you like to look—wouldn't you like to know—"

He broke off with the same dismal chuckle as before, apparently too much exhausted to say more.

A damp dew had gathered on Austin's forehead, and his eyes wandered nervously round the room, first resting vacantly on the cabinet in the corner, then straying back to the sick man's pillow. Presently, finding his uncle's face still turned towards him, he started, and murmured feebly:

"How can you think I care—at such a time as this—"

But even as he spoke he saw the withered eyelids slowly droop until at last they altogether closed. The sudden flicker had subsided, and the old man relapsed into his former state, giving no sign of life save an occasional tremor of the limbs and now and then a faint catching of the breath. Dr. Plummer came forward with soft, solemn step, and, putting out his plump white hand towards the thin yellow one that lay extended on the bed-clothes, pressed his fingers on the wrinkled wrist.

"A comatose condition which can only terminate in dissolution," he whispered authoritatively. "The end may be expected from one minute to another."

Having delivered this dictum, the doctor stole noiselessly back to his seat, and equally noiselessly Mrs. Muggridge subsided into the comfortable chair she had provided for herself behind the curtain at the farther side of the bed. For two or three minutes more Austin stood gazing

dreamily around—at the closed eyes that had so lately looked on him, at the cabinet in the corner, at the white pillow that swelled upward round the dying man's head. At last, seeing the doctor once more apply himself to his note-book, he was reminded that he might be kept standing there for some time, and, with another mechanical look round, he too sat down to wait.

To wait! What for? Stunned and mazed as were his senses, he could not help asking himself this question as the idea of waiting occurred to him; and he could not help answering it with a horrible particularity of detail that made him tremble. He was waiting for the cessation of those occasional slight tremors of the limbs and those faint catchings of the breath, for the final subsidence of the slow pulse beating under the wrinkled wrist which he could still see from his place by the bedside (the face was hidden by the half-drawn curtain), for the transmutation into lifeless clay of yonder human heap that lay beneath the bed-clothes—sluggish and inert, and yet, while it retained the name of man, an insuperable barrier between him and the top drawer of the cabinet in the corner.

He shut his eyes in horror at his own thoughts. What! to be impatient of the poor remnant of life even now ebbing out of those frozen veins, to feel angry with the poor departing spirit for its lingering—angry now—now that it really was departing! He tried to think of other things, and when he found he could not, tried not to think at all, tried to count the tickings of the clock on the chimney-piece.

One, two, three, four—How slow those tickings came, as though the clock itself were tired—worn out with waiting! Tick, tick, tick, tick—wait, wait, wait, wait. Ah! what a frightful thing it was to wait—worse even than to die. The dying knew nothing, felt nothing; were in a state of suspended consciousness both as regards this world and the next, whereas the waiting—Strange to think of, that those who were thus themselves nonentities, dead to this state of existence and not yet awakened to another, should nevertheless have this grim power of arresting the action of the living, of holding all the business of life in abeyance, of keeping keys under their pillows—

He shuddered. The demon of impatience had come upon him again, and again he must strive to cast it forth. Tick, tick, tick, tick—but the monotonous sound only made him more impatient still. He tried harder than ever to think of something else, but the thoughts that presented themselves had a hideous fantastic incongruity about them that made him shudder anew. He came into his head, for instance, how he had once read of some great man's mother who, being occupied as Uncle Gilbert was occupied now, had sent down word to a friend who called to see her that she was particularly engaged in dying. Engaged in dying—what an idea—as though it were some business which required time and attention to execute. Well, and so it did require time—he might see that for himself—a long time. And then he fell to wondering if the old lady who had spoken of death so lightly had kept as busy waiting as he was being kept waiting now, if in her room there had been a cabinet, if under her pillow there had been a key, if—

Impatient again! How horrible it was—

horrible that, finding he absolutely could not keep impatience off, he began trying to think if he had any excuse for feeling it. Ah! surely if any one in this world had any excuse for impatience under such circumstances, that one was himself. How long and wearily he had waited, what years and years of slow crushing anguish he had suffered—and all by means of the old man whose last dregs of life were even now oozing out so tardily. Ah! how he had suffered! what torture that old man had put him to—that dreaded, hated, abhorred old man! A vision of the past rose before him—his happy Liverpool home, his three pretty little children, his wife's smiling face; and then other memories came crowding after these—the squalid gentility of his life under Uncle Gilbert's eyes, the tedium of enforced idleness, his wife's tears and pallid cheeks, his own patient endurance of taunts and insults that at one time it would have set his blood boiling to think of, three tiny coffins borne one after the other across the threshold of that ill-omened rent-free house—ay, and other memories still, which as they presented themselves made him almost groan aloud in agony.

Oh! the wreck, the waste that his life had been—would be, at least, if there should be disappointment now. Disappointment! He felt his tongue grow dry within his mouth as he thought of it, as he asked himself in despair how he should bear it. But he could not bear it, he would not. If disappointment came, he would simply walk to the nearest pool deep enough for a man to lie down in—His poor wife and daughter would miss him for a time, but he could not help that—not even for their sakes could he endure his life longer if disappointment was in store.

Yes, but then disappointment was not in store—he was sure of it, he knew it, and why should he harass himself? In the top drawer of yonder cabinet lay that which was to repair the ruin of his life, which was to make up to him all, and more than all, that he had suffered. Oh! if only he could get one look, if only the time would come when he might put his hand under that pillow—But as he reached this point he found his heart beating so fast and his whole blood in such a fever of excitement, that he was obliged to break off in sheer apprehension lest he should somehow commit himself in the presence of the doctor and the housekeeper. He must be patient—he must wait a little longer.

Tick, tick, tick, tick. He would not think more, but sat listening to the clock, to the occasional rustle of the housekeeper's dress as she made an involuntary change of position, to the faint scratching of the doctor's pencil as it travelled over the lines of the note-book—a dreary concert of slight sounds only varied from time to time by a yet slighter sound that now and then would come from the bed. As he listened to it all, he thought the monotony would turn his brain. But how could he escape?

At last the scratching of the pencil ceased. The doctor, having apparently written all that he had to write, put the note-book back into his pocket. Then he raised his eyes and took a long look in the direction of the patient still lying between life and death, then he twiddled with his gold chain, then he took out his pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose in dumb show, and

lastly he drew forth his watch. Was it possible that he was beginning to get impatient too?

Just as Austin was thinking thus, his eyes and the doctor's met. The latter immediately rose, and, coming towards him on tiptoe, whispered:

"It may be some time still before a change supervenes. What do you say to going down stairs for a little? Mrs. Muggidge will call us if any thing happens. Or would you prefer—"

"Thank you, I would much rather wait in the parlor," said Austin hastily.

Wait! What an awkwardly chosen expression! But it had slipped from him unawares.

The doctor staid a moment to whisper a few words of routine instruction to Mrs. Muggidge, then rejoined Austin, and they left the room together. Ah! what an emancipation it was to breathe the fresh air of the staircase, to be out of earshot of that horrible clock!

They went down stairs to the parlor—a large and lofty, though, by reason of the meagreness of its furniture, a somewhat bare and cold-looking room. But no sooner had Austin entered it than he felt that the task of waiting here would be no less oppressive than the task of waiting up stairs had been. The restraint of a stranger's presence was intolerable—perhaps more intolerable, now that he was at liberty to speak and move at discretion, than in the chamber of death itself. He felt so utterly helpless as to what he ought to say or do.

"A wonderful constitution," remarked the doctor, gently letting himself drop into an arm-chair. "Really I don't know when I have met with another such in the whole course of my professional experience."

"Oh! very," said Austin, looking abstractedly out of the window, whither he had loitered because he felt that by standing he would better preserve his freedom of action than by sitting down. But he had hardly begun to look when he bethought himself what passers-by might say if they saw him standing at the window on such a day as this, and he came away to plant himself before an old-fashioned engraving of the "Death of Charles the Fifth."

"Let me see, eighty-six last birth-day, I think," went on the doctor pensively. "Ah! a very advanced age, to be sure!"

"Yes," said Austin, wincing.

As if he did not know that already! What did the man mean by bothering him? And then he fell to wondering if there was any body waiting down stairs when Charles the Fifth lay dying, and, if so, how they managed to pass the time.

There was another pause, again broken by the doctor, who, sitting opposite the window, commanded a view of the garden and path leading up to the house.

"Dear me, here is Mr. Podmore. Coming to inquire, I suppose."

A subdued ring made itself heard, and Austin, to whom any distraction was welcome, looked eagerly towards the door. There was a low-voiced parley in the hall, and immediately afterwards Mr. Podmore was shown in.

Mr. Podmore was a person of some importance in Chorcombe, being neither more nor less than the principal lawyer of the place. He was a short stoutish man with a large nose, upright standing hair, a well developed bump of self

teem, and an impressively dignified countenance, made more dignified still by a white neckcloth, spotless as his own reputation, which he wore on all occasions. But, awe-inspiring as Mr. Podmore looked, his character was not altogether without the softer social attributes. He was always of course dignified, as befitted one high in the confidence of all the best families of the neighborhood, but in the company of those whom he considered to be of his own set he could come out as a good fellow and bon-vivant, and even, with reverence be it spoken, as something of a gossip.

He shook hands cordially with his friend the doctor—cordially, yet with a certain decorous lush about his manner which was his mode of paying tribute to the grim visitor whose shadow even then rested on the house.

"Ah! Plummer, how do you do? I just stopped at the door to inquire, and when I heard you were here I thought I would look in on you for a minute. And so things are quite at the last, they tell me?"

"Quite," said the doctor. "It may take place now at any moment."

Here Austin Waters, still standing before the picture, made a slight movement which drew towards him the attention of the new-comer, who advanced to greet him very politely—more politely perhaps than he had ever done before.

"Ah! Mr. Austin, I beg your pardon. You are pretty well, I hope?"

"Pretty well," said Austin hoarsely.

"Oh yes! to be sure—very trying occasion of course. Well, well, it is a debt we must all pay."

Austin did not answer; he was thinking of the top drawer of the cabinet, and for the instant could think of nothing else.

"And then he is an old man and has had a long life, you must remember," went on the lawyer in his most consoling tones.

"Oh yes! certainly," assented Austin.

"Enjoying all his faculties, too, up to the very last. And what a thing that is to be thankful for, especially where there is property to be disposed of."

The blood rushed to Austin's face; it had just occurred to him that perhaps Mr. Podmore, who had been for many years occasionally employed as his uncle's lawyer, might already possess the knowledge he so thirsted for.

"But I suppose all that has been settled years ago," continued Mr. Podmore, looking at him a little inquisitively. "He was too good a man of business to leave such a thing to the last."

"Do—do you not know, then?" stammered Austin.

Mr. Podmore shook his head.

"I? Oh no! it was a subject he never so much as mentioned. It is a fancy with some people to make a mystery about such things, you know."

Austin said nothing, but merely set himself to look at the picture harder than ever—so hard that at last he could almost imagine himself projected into the death-chamber which it represented. The artist had depicted a piece of furniture opposite the bed that recalled the cabinet up stairs, and it seemed as though he could never have done gazing at it and speculating on what it might contain.

Mr. Podmore glanced at him with some ap-

pearance of curiosity, then, seeing that he was not inclined for further conversation, turned once more to his friend the doctor, and the pair sat down.

There was silence between them for a little while—another tribute to the presence of the grim visitor up stairs—but at last one of the two made a low-toned remark to the effect that it was a cold day, and the other said yes it was, and after that they got on swimmingly. One or two whispered questions and answers were first exchanged as to the nature of the case in the room above, then something was said as to the amount of illness in the village generally, then the weather was once more touched upon, and finally the conversation wandered off to such irrelevant topics as the state of the funds and the prospects of the session. But Austin hardly heard a word, and what he did hear had no meaning for him.

He came away from the picture at last, afraid that the others might guess what it was that interested him in it, and took to walking up and down—as softly as possible, so that the creaking of his footsteps might not drown any other sound. For all this time he was intently listening—listening for some sign from up stairs.

Presently he stopped, listening more intently than ever, and his heart gave a bound.

He thought he had heard something like a door opening up stairs. And after a few seconds more of such listening his heart gave another bound. He distinctly heard a foot on the upper landing.

The foot began to descend the stairs; he could hear it each time that it was set down—hear it in spite of the chattering of the two men beside him. At last he heard it reach the bottom of the staircase—advance along the hall—pause outside the parlor-door—ah! how his heart beat! And yet even then the two men took no notice.

The door opened, and Mrs. Muggridge appeared, her red face not quite so red as usual.

"Oh! sir, if you please—" she began, looking at the doctor, then paused and dropped a courtesy.

The doctor looked round, fairly roused at last.

"Well?" he asked with grave attention.

"If you please, sir, I thought just now as how master seemed to be lying very quiet like, and I went up to look at him close, and if you please, sir—"

She dropped another courtesy, and every body in the room knew what had happened. Every body—even Austin, though from his dull fixed gaze and statue-like immobility he might have been deemed incapable of understanding any thing.

There was a minute's silence during which the falling of a pin might have been heard, and then the doctor said:

"I am going up stairs. Would you like to come too?"

He moved forward, and Mr. Podmore followed, the latter, however, making way as he drew near the door for Austin to precede him. Austin saw that he was expected to accompany them, and went. But his whole faculties were for the time benumbed—so benumbed that he had ceased to think even of the cabinet-drawer.

They entered the gray sombre room up stairs—more gray and sombre than ever now, for the

day was beginning to wane—and stood by the side of that spectral four-post bed, looking at what lay there.

"Yes, it is quite over," whispered the doctor, bending forward to touch the wrinkled hand that Austin had sat watching a while ago.

"It seems to have been very peaceful," murmured the lawyer.

"As quiet as a lamb," softly put in Mrs. Muggridge.

Austin did not speak—only stood with his eyes riveted on the withered, pinched, dead face that lay upon the pillow, as intently as though his gaze sought to penetrate beyond the face and the pillow too. And indeed as he looked he did begin to think of something on the other side of that face and the other side of that pillow. He began to think of the key of the cabinet-drawer.

He began to think of it, and when he had once begun he could not keep himself from going on, until presently he was able to think of nothing else, until he had almost forgotten the dead face which lay before him on the pillow, and only remembered what was underneath. Ah! that key, that key—if he might only feel his fingers close on it, if he might only fit it into the lock of yonder drawer! If only he might! But how was he to get it from that dead guardianship with others looking on? He knew that they had no right to say him nay, but, for all that, he dared not let them see what things were in his mind. He must be patient yet a little while—patient though those throbbing pulses of his should burst with longing. And so, tutoring himself to patience, he stood, looking at the dead face, but thinking of the key of the cabinet-drawer. Oh! when, when?

The others stood and looked too, keeping a solemn silence, which pressed on Austin's heart like a weight of lead. At last the voice of the doctor was heard saying in subdued tones:

"Well, you will see that every thing is properly arranged, Mrs. Muggridge."

"Yes sir. And if you would have no objection, sir, to let me call in Mrs. Thompson to help—a nice respectable woman with four children, as clean and civil-spoken—"

"I dare say it would be a very good plan," said the doctor. "But any thing of that kind you had better mention to Mr. Austin; he is the person you have to look to now, you know."

Austin heard, and a sudden flush rose to his cheeks. He thought he saw how he might get at the key without further delay.

"I can say nothing about that," he answered, raising his eyes. "And of course nobody can say any thing until we have seen what is in the—"

He paused and glanced at the lawyer, who supplied the word immediately.

"The will? Ah! to be sure. Yes, we must be beginning to think about the will soon."

"It is in that cabinet—the top drawer," said Austin quickly. "And the key is under the pillow; he told me himself. Shall—shall—"

He looked at the lawyer imploringly.

"I think we may as well," said Mr. Podmore, answering the look. "It is desirable to know as soon as possible if any instructions are left for our immediate guidance."

Austin put his hand towards the bed-head, and, turning once more to Mr. Podmore to

make sure that he had really obtained sanction for what he was about to do, slid it gently under the pillow. For an instant he shuddered as he felt on his hand the weight of the dead man's head, but in the next his fingers had come in contact with a bunch of keys, and he shuddered no more.

He drew the keys forth, and, almost blinded though he was with agitation, immediately singled out one he knew to be that which he wanted, then, nearly tottering as he went, crossed the room to the cabinet. Somehow he managed to put the key into the lock of the top drawer, and in another second the drawer was open.

A single packet lay there—a packet on the covering of which were inscribed in the old man's largest and clearest hand the words, "Last Will and Testament of Gilbert Waters." The expectant heir clutched at the document, then, with another look towards the lawyer, laid his fingers on the seal.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Podmore, with a glance at the bed. "Had we not better go down stairs?"

Austin dared not disobey the suggestion, and moved towards the door without a word. Presently, having, he knew not how, made his way down stairs, he found himself again in the parlor, with the lawyer and doctor beside him, and in his hand the packet out of the cabinet drawer. He laid his fingers once more on the seal, and this time Mr. Podmore gave him a sign of encouragement.

But his fingers trembled so that he could do nothing. The lawyer came to his assistance.

"Shall I open it, Mr. Austin? Such things are more in my way than yours, perhaps."

Austin nodded. Mr. Podmore took the packet from his unresisting hands, broke the seal, and drew from the envelope a paper which he straightway began to unfold.

What a rustling that paper made! and what a time the man was in opening it, and smoothing it out, and getting it under his eye-glass! Would he never have done?

At last all preliminaries were completed; the will—Uncle Gilbert's will—was spread open on the table, and Mr. Podmore had got his eye-glass fairly to bear on it.

"Ha—hum—let me see—yes, all in proper form—duly signed and attested—ah! done at Bristol—twenty-one years ago. Ah—hum—hum—I, Gilbert Waters—sound mind—and so on—hum—hum—ah! here we are—give and bequeath—hum—hum—My dear Mr. Waters" (here the lawyer looked up with something of surprise in his manner), "allow me to offer you my very best congratulations. You are your uncle's sole heir and legatee."

Austin's pale lips moved slightly, but no sound came from them.

"Yes, there is no mistake about it—all estate and effects, real and personal, whatsoever and wheresoever, and so on—nephew Austin Waters and heirs forever—all as clear as crystal. And dear me, Mr. Waters, I must congratulate you again—here is a memorandum in your uncle's handwriting dated last week and addressed to you as his heir, by which I see that the property is even larger than—"

But Austin Waters heard no more. With a faint cry he had fallen on the floor at the lawyer's feet.

CHAPTER V.

NEW-BORN HONORS.

If a stranger had happened to be passing through Chorcombe next morning, he might have noticed with some curiosity a certain house in a certain street which seemed to be attracting to itself all the attention of idlers and passers by. Every body who went by gave it a glance, sometimes even stopping to stare up at the windows; and yet the house was only a plain, rather shabby, one-storied cottage exactly like the others on each side, while the windows, protected by closely drawn blinds, defied the most attentive scrutiny. If the hypothetical stranger, noticing all these things, had been sufficiently inquisitive to ask what was remarkable about this dwelling, apparently only distinguished from its neighbors by greater silence and more decorous avoidance of publicity, he would have been told that the owner had just succeeded by the death of a relative to a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds.

For so indeed it was. The owner of the house was Austin Waters, and Austin Waters was old Gilbert's sole heir and legatee, with no possible hitch or flaw in his legateship. There was no ambiguity discovered or discoverable in the wording of the will, no disappointed claimant raising doubts as to the testator's sanity, no inconvenient codicil turning up in a hayloft, or bed-tester, or secret drawer, or, for that matter, in existence. Uncle Gilbert had taken pleasure in tormenting his nephew with doubts of his good faith, had so tormented him cruelly and pitilessly, but he had never really meditated such treachery as would have been involved in the violation of his promise. And now the promise was fulfilled, gloriously, superabundantly fulfilled, and Austin's humble dwelling, with its drawn blinds and hushed exterior, was marked out as that of the richest man in Chorcombe.

Inside the house every thing was in an unquiet, unsettled state strangely at variance with the demurely tranquil aspect which it presented to the external world. Nothing was in its right place that morning, nothing was done at its right time. There was a tumult and confusion, a hurrying up and down stairs, a jumble of irrelevant question and answer—a general commotion through the household which looked as though for its members the whole world had been turned upside down. And indeed this was not very far from being the case.

In the little parlor where he had yesterday been discussing the chances of wealth or ruin, Austin Waters sat at his desk, pen in hand. He had soon regained consciousness after his fainting-fit, and, having duly taken a sleeping-draught prescribed for him on the previous evening, had this morning received an early visit from Dr. Plummer (the first that the doctor had paid that day), and was pronounced to be surmounting the immediate shock of his bereavement very satisfactorily. But, Dr. Plummer's sleeping-draught notwithstanding, he had scarcely closed his eyes all night through.

It has been said that he was at his desk; but though he had been at his desk all morning, he had as yet hardly begun the first of the notes of intimation which he had sat down to write. His *thoughts were wandering so that in any case he would have found it next to impossible to concen-*

trate them, and, as it happened, he was being perpetually distracted by external interruptions. First it was the doctor, who had so kindly given him precedence of all other patients; then it was the Rev. Mr. Elkins, the parish clergyman, who called with the most friendly condolences and offers of service on behalf of Mrs. Elkins and himself; then it was a succession of polite inquirers at the street door, varied by the delivery of some half-dozen circulars from different tradesmen in the neighborhood who in the most obliging way imaginable offered their goods for inspection, especially drawing attention to the quality of their mournings. Nor was this all; there was Mrs. Waters, who, her face unwontedly flushed, but her manner almost as quiet as ever, sat sewing beside her husband in the parlor; and there was Emmy, incessantly tripping in and out of the room about something or other, and apparently under physical incapacity to be still for two minutes together. Poor Emmy! she tried hard to show, she even tried hard to feel, some touch of seemingly regret for the sad event which had raised the family to sudden greatness, but she did not the least in the world succeed. It was such a delicious new experience, this of being rich, and she was so happy in it! As for the feeling which had crossed her for a moment yesterday, that Uncle Gilbert's money might perhaps be a matter of comparative indifference, she was separated from the state of mind which made it possible by what seemed to be a gulf of ages.

"I wonder Madame Lebrun isn't here," said Emmy, as for the fiftieth time at least that morning she came fluttering into the parlor. "I think she ought to have been by this time, don't you, mamma? She might know that people are always in a hurry about mournings."

Madame Lebrun (name supposed originally to have been Brown) was the fashionable dressmaker of Chorcombe, and Emmy had never yet worn a dress made by other hands than her mother's or her own.

"She will come soon, my dear, no doubt. Had you not better sit down and wait patiently? I am afraid we are disturbing your papa sadly."

"Not at all, not at all," said Austin, looking up and pushing away his papers as though glad of the respite. "There is plenty of time before the post goes, and even if there were not—Let me see, what were you saying? Madame Lebrun, the dressmaker—you are sure she is a first-rate one, eh? Mind, you are to have every thing first-rate now."

"Oh! but she is quite first-rate, papa, I assure you; indeed I have heard people say she makes as well as the London ones, almost. If you only saw the dress she sent home last week to Miss Egerton—a splendid pink satin at ten shillings a yard—only fancy!"

"Ten shillings a yard, was it? Then look here, child, tell the woman to make you another pink satin exactly like it—at twenty shillings a yard if she likes—there!"

"You dear papa! But that wouldn't do with the mourning, you know."

"The mourning, ah yes! I forgot the mourning. But you are to be dressed like ladies, mind—the best of every thing. What are the handsomest stuffs that can be worn in mourning? tell me."

"Oh! I don't know, papa, there are so many

ings. *Moire* antique and velvet—these would be more suitable for mamma, perhaps—and then here's silk—”

“*Moire* antique and velvet. Agnes, remember—never any thing commoner.”

Mrs. Waters looked up at her husband with a smile, a smile almost as bright as her smiles used to be of old—such is the healing power of wealth even on those who are least its worshippers. “Never any thing commoner! But, my dear, how do you think I am to get comfortably through the work of the day—”

“Work of the day! you are to do no more work. You have always been a lady—the best in the county—and now you are going to live like one. I wish you would put down that sewing—what is the good of it all now?”

“But it is a pleasure to me, Austin—really it is. I should not like to be sitting idle.”

“Oh! well, if you actually prefer to be always sewing—”

“Oh! we shall soon get mamma out of all that,” put in Emmy apologetically. “But seriously, it would be a good plan to make up our minds what we want before Madame Lebrun comes. And really I think that for mamma a *moire* antique and a velvet, and perhaps a silk for morning wear—”

“Very well, and tell the woman to make you two of each kind while she is about it.”

“Two of each kind, Austin?” said Mrs. Waters, with another bright smile. “I should be puzzled to find house-room for them, I am afraid.”

“Very likely you would here, but what do you say to Chorcombe Lodge, pray?” (Chorcombe Lodge was the name of Uncle Gilbert's house.) “Room enough to keep a few dresses there, I fancy. And if you think I'm going to stop a day longer than I can help in a beastly hole like this while we have got a splendid house waiting to receive us— Ah! Agnes, my own Agnes, you shall see, you shall see; we have gone through a great deal, but all will be made up now.”

Mrs. Waters did not answer (perhaps she remembered better than her husband what it was that had to be made up), but Emmy laid her white hand on her father's shoulder, and echoed:

“Oh yes, papa; all made up now.”

“Yes, my darling, and made up to you too.” He slid his arm round her waist, and looked fondly up in her radiant face. “You are an heiress now, Emmy, as good an heiress as any in England, and we shall let them all see that you are, shan't we? Take you up to London, and show you off in Belgravia; what do you say to that?”

“To London! Oh, papa!” exclaimed Emmy, her breath almost taken away by so magnificent a prospect.

“Yes, and make you the belle of the season; how will you like it? All the fashionable young gentlemen sighing at your feet, and perhaps a lord or two among them, who knows?”

“Oh, papa! what nonsense you do talk!” was Emmy's remonstrance, but she gave a little side-glance at the picture in the dark corner oven while she uttered it.

Here there was a tap at the door, which presently opened to disclose the somewhat untidy head of the charwoman who had been hired to *elp on this occasion of extra work and confu-*

“Here's madam, if you please, mum.”

“Show her up stairs to my bedroom,” answered Emmy, “we shall be there directly. I must go now, papa dear; we can't keep Madame Lebrun waiting. Mamma, will you come too? Do make haste.”

And with these words she tripped lightly out of the room and up stairs. Ah! how happy she was—how exquisitely happy! it was more delightful to be rich even than she had imagined. And only to think of that John Thwaites as good as saying he wished her to be poor all her life! How cruel, how selfish!

Mrs. Waters put aside her work, and prepared to leave the room, rather slowly and lingeringly however, and looking all the time intently at her husband, who had once more drawn his papers towards him. Before she had reached the door she paused, and, coming back close to where he sat, said softly:

“Austin, now you will be able to pay—”

She sunk her voice so low that the next word was inaudible, and yet, inaudible though it was, she accompanied it with a half-frightened glance round the room as if to make sure that she was not overheard.

He evidently knew what she meant, and answered promptly:

“Pay him—I should think I will—pay him twice over—yes, and ten thousand pounds besides by way of interest.”

She shook her head gently.

“I am sure he will take nothing more than what he has lent, but I should like him to have that. You will send it soon, won't you?”

“Of course I will—am I not just as anxious about it as you are? But it is no good sending it until we know whether there is any chance of his coming over, as he talked of in his last letter.”

“I wish you would see about it, dear Austin. There must surely be another letter waiting for us by this time, and I am so longing to know—it would be such a pleasure—”

“Oh, yes! and so it would be a pleasure to me, of course. I'll tell you what, I'll take the train over to Bristol one day this week; I need not grudge the fare now, or a cab to the post-office either. I am sure you must know that I am quite as much interested in it as you can be.”

“Thank you, dear,” she might have said more, but just then a double knock sounded at the street-door, and she hurried to make her escape up stairs before the visitor, whoever he was, should have been admitted.

She had not been a moment gone when, with a profusion of polite bows, there entered a smug well-fed personage—at present somewhat solemnly got up in an irreproachable suit of black, and with all the smirks carefully smoothed out of a face naturally rather jovial than otherwise. This was Mr. Jupp, by calling house-agent and auctioneer, but also willing to be employed as undertaker in the case of any genteel funeral that might take place in the neighborhood.

It was in his capacity of undertaker that he had called this morning, and he had done his best to assume his most decorous undertaker's manner.

“I hope I see you well, sir,” he began in carefully modulated tones while he softly glided into the room—“as well at least as circums-

stances permit. Ah! most melancholy—very much so indeed.”

“Oh! certainly,” assented the mourner, a little awkwardly perhaps, for he was rather taken aback by this way of looking at things.

“I have to apologize for intruding at such a time, but business, you know— I understand from Dr. Plummer that you think of employing me on the present occasion, sir?”

“Yes, he was mentioning your name this morning, and—”

“Ah yes! he is always kind enough to recommend me at these times. A most superior person is Dr. Plummer, and I am quite aware how much I have to think him for. So I have taken the liberty of just calling to ask on what principles you would wish the ceremony conducted, sir. I presume on the largest scale—”

“Oh! on the largest scale by all means.”

“Just so, sir, with all appropriate adjuncts. Oh! I was quite sure it would be your wish to show every respect possible. Well, he occupied a great position in the county, sir.”

“Very,” said Austin rather dreamily.

“And his successor occupies a great position after him, sir. Ah! Mr. Waters, I don’t know whether you will regard it as a liberty, but if you would allow me to offer my humble congratulations— Such a pleasure as the news has been to me, sir—to me and every body else in the place, I may say.” Here Mr. Jupp relapsed so far into his ordinary house-agent’s manner as actually to begin rubbing his hands, but, quickly recollecting the nature of his present business, he checked himself, and added solemnly: “And what day, sir, would you wish to fix for the obsequies?”

“I—I should like it to be as soon as possible,” said Austin, looking at the undertaker rather wistfully.

“Shall we say this day week, Mr. Waters? We can hardly make it earlier for an affair of any importance.”

Austin’s countenance fell.

“Oh! very well, this day week if you wish it. I only thought that the sooner it was got over—that is—but of course I wish to pay all the respect in my power. And—and how soon afterwards do you think it would be considered usual for us to move into the house—after the—the funeral, I mean? This is such a very inconvenient little place, you see—”

“Oh! certainly you must get out of it as soon as possible. But as for moving directly to Chorcombe Lodge, I can hardly say if— The lawyers always make so many delays about proving the will and that kind of thing, don’t they? And then you wouldn’t wish to go in until it has been properly done up and decorated, of course.”

“What! do you mean to tell me I have got to stop in this hole till—”

“Stop here! Oh! dear no, not a day longer than you like. For that matter, I myself could name two or three highly eligible temporary residences in the neighborhood that would suit you to a hair—replete with every convenience for a nobleman’s or gentleman’s establishment. And you know it is absolutely necessary that something very considerable should be done to Chorcombe Lodge before it is fit to be occupied by a family of position. Why, it is almost twice too small, to begin with. Look at Egerton House, for instance.”

“True, true,” cried Austin eagerly, “I had never thought of that. Of course it must be altered—a paltry old-fashioned place— But I am afraid it will be very difficult.”

“Oh no! it won’t—not a bit. A handsome wing run up at each side, and a touch or two put to the centre building just to give it a character—something in the way of a cupola or battlemented tower perhaps—and say a Grecian portico thrown out in front—oh! the effect would be something remarkable.”

The picture thus conjured up was so pleasing to Mr. Jupp’s mind’s eye that the undertaker became finally forgotten in the artist, and he positively smacked his lips with hypothetical admiration.

“A capital idea!” said Austin, looking much impressed. “Really I wonder how you came to think of it.”

“Ah! but you see I’m in the way of hearing of such things,” replied Mr. Jupp modestly. “Why, I happen to know of a case where just such an alteration was made (a nobleman’s house that was too small for him), and strange enough the architect was my own cousin. Tovey of Bristol, architect and land-surveyor—I don’t know whether you may have heard the name, but it will be a celebrated one some day, and I’m not afraid of saying so. And that reminds me, if you really thought of any little improvement of the sort, he would be just the man for it.”

“I’m sure you are very kind,” said Austin gratefully. “And upon my word— Dear me, how that knocker has been going all day!”

Another knock had just sounded at the street-door, causing both Mr. Jupp and his patron to look up with an air of some annoyance. In a minute more the summons was answered, and Mr. Podmore the lawyer was announced.

“My dear sir, how do you do?” said that gentleman, advancing with unwonted geniality of manner. “I have an appointment in the neighborhood at two—oh! just five minutes to spare, I see—and I could not bring myself to pass without looking in to inquire— Ah! Mr. Jupp.”

He nodded stiffly towards Mr. Jupp, who, understanding that he was in the way and having no further pretext for remaining, muttered something about a particular engagement, and bowed himself out. Meantime the lawyer went on:

“And Mrs. and Miss Waters—they are pretty well, I hope?”

It was the first time that he had ever taken cognizance of the existence of Mrs. and Miss Waters, and Austin could not repress a feeling of surprise as he answered in the affirmative.

“I am happy to hear it,” said Mr. Podmore warmly. “And now, as I perceive you have some writing to do—”

“Oh! but I am delighted to see you,” interrupted Austin hastily. “Indeed I particularly wished an opportunity of asking—I dare say you may think it rather a strange question, Mr. Podmore, but you see there are matters of business that must be thought of at the most—most trying times even. And I just wanted to ask if you thought it would take very long to—to prove the will, and—and get things into order, you understand.”

Mr. Podmore reflected.

“That depends very much on the firm to whose hands the business is intrusted, Mr. Waters.”

And as of course I am not aware who may be the legal adviser—”

“Oh! Mr. Podmore, it will be you, won't it? I'm sure I never thought of any body else for a single instant, and if only you wouldn't object—”

Mr. Podmore seemed quite taken by surprise by the suggestion, but after gravely considering a few seconds, during which Austin kept his eyes intently fixed on him, answered with much affability:

“Mr. Waters, I accept the charge. I shall have pleasure in endeavoring to promote your interests in every way in my power.”

“I am so much obliged to you,” said Austin humbly. “And if you could manage that there should be as little delay as possible—”

“I will take care of that, Mr. Waters. And of course I need not remark that any little advance which may be convenient for your immediate purposes I shall be most happy to make.”

“You are very, very kind, I'm sure. You won't consider it odd, I hope, but one is naturally anxious to get settled, and then I have been thinking of some alterations in the house which I should like to set about pretty soon.”

“Ah! some alterations in the house?” said Mr. Podmore, looking up from his watch, which he had just drawn out. “Dear me, I must be going. Chorcombe Lodge, you mean?”

“Yes, perhaps a wing to be run up at each side, and a cupola or turret or something like that on the top—to give it a character, you know. A good plan, don't you think?”

Mr. Podmore reflected again; he never gave an opinion off-hand.

“Well, I dare say something of the kind would be desirable—highly desirable indeed, now that I think of it. If you will excuse me, my dear sir, I must positively be off now. We will talk of this some other time, and perhaps I may be even able to recommend—but that will do afterwards.”

“There is a Mr. Tovey of Bristol who has been named to me as a first-rate architect,” said Austin, thinking it as well that Mr. Podmore should know exactly how matters stood. “It seems he is Mr. Jupp's cousin, and Mr. Jupp says—”

The lawyer slightly frowned.

“Mr. Jupp! Oh! never mind Mr. Jupp. I think I can find somebody to manage it a great deal better than Mr. Jupp or Mr. Tovey either. But if you will allow me, now I must really—Dear me, five minutes past two. Good-day—I shall have the pleasure again before long—good-day.”

With these words Mr. Podmore, who prided himself on business-like punctuality, bustled out, and Austin was once more alone. But he had scarcely been left a minute to himself when Emmy made a violent irruption into the room.

“Oh! papa, I thought they were never going, and I have such a lot to tell you. She is to make me two dresses, just to begin with, that is; a silk and a grenadine—the grenadine for evening wear, with the loveliest bugle trimming. She made one exactly like it only last week for Lady Mary Somebody—I forget her name, but some earl's daughter or other, so you may fancy. And oh! papa, she says this Lady Mary and I are so much alike—we might almost do for sisters. Didn't she say so, mamma?” (here she turned to

appeal to her mother, who had just then entered) only that, if any thing, I have rather the best figure.”

“My dear Emmy, I am afraid your papa will think your new dresses are making you quite conceited.”

“Well, and if she is, she has as much to be conceited about as any Lady Mary of them all,” said her father, looking at her proudly.

Emmy blushed, and seemed about to utter a disclaimer, when a new summons from the knocker came to interrupt the conversation.

“It seems nobody can let us alone to-day,” said Austin grumblingly, but yet looking not ill-pleased. “Who is it now, I wonder?”

“I—I fancy it is Mr. Thwaites's knock,” murmured Emmy, and then, biting her lip for having committed herself so far, she added quickly: “Shall you and I go up stairs, mamma?”

“I think it would look unkind not to stop and see a friend like Mr. Thwaites, my dear.”

Emmy said nothing, and as it was not her way to give up a point in silence, it is probable that her mother's decision coincided with her own wishes.

There was a minute's pause, during which Emmy felt very hot and uncomfortable, and then, as she had expected, Mr. Thwaites was announced. She had expected him, and yet as he entered she fell suddenly into a great flutter, and when it came to her turn to shake hands, the circumstances of their yesterday's parting recurred to her mind with such vividness that she could scarcely see or hear for confusion. She was so much confused that she actually fancied he might be going to squeeze her hand again.

But he did not give it even the faintest pressure, and, regaining composure a little, she remembered what had happened since yesterday, and understood how absurd that fancy of hers had been.

“I hope you will excuse the liberty,” she heard him say presently—but he was speaking to her parents, not to her. “I thought I would just come and see how you all are, and—”

“It was very kind of you indeed,” said Mrs. Waters cordially. “Pray take a chair.”

He sat down, and every body else followed his example. As Emmy did so she took the opportunity of throwing a little glance across the room (he had stationed himself as far from her as possible), just for curiosity. She was half angry to see how gloomy and morose he was looking—almost as if he were sulking at the good fortune of the family.

“And then I wanted to—to congratulate you on—on what has happened—that is, of course—you understand what I mean. And I do congratulate you very, very much, Mr. Austin, you and every one.”

Then he was not sulky, after all—only in low spirits, and that of course was a matter wholly beyond his own control. Emmy's little flicker of anger died out at once.

“We are much obliged to you, Mr. Thwaites,” she heard her father say. “I accept your congratulations with a great deal of pleasure.”

“It makes one happier to feel one has such sincere warm-hearted friends as you in the world,” said Mrs. Waters earnestly.

What a kind darling her mother was, to be sure! Her father's manner was more dignified

of course, but then her mother's was so sweet and winning—one could hardly wish it different.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," said the visitor, looking at the table covered with papers. "You are busy, I see."

"Oh! there is no such hurry," answered Austin graciously. "A little extra to do and to think of certainly, but that is what we must expect for some time to come. We shall be moving soon, you know."

"Yes?" said the young man timidly. "To — to Chorcombe Lodge, I suppose!"

"To Chorcombe Lodge when it has been made fit for a gentleman to live in," responded Austin, with a somewhat haughty wave of the hand. "I am going to build."

Emmy looked up, so much interested in the information that for a moment she almost forgot the presence of John Thwaites.

"Build, papa!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly, my dear," he made answer a little grandiloquently. "A handsome wing on each side, with perhaps a battlemented tower and cupola in the middle, and a Grecian portico thrown out in front— Impossible to live in the place till something of the kind has been done, at all events."

Emmy was mute with astonishment and delight—delight to hear of such magnificence being in store for her, delight that John Thwaites should be there to hear of it too. And yet she knew all the time that what so gratified her would to him be more or less painful.

"I—I dare say it will be a great improvement," stammered poor John.

"You must come and see us when it is finished and tell us what you think of it," said Austin affably.

"I hope Mr. Thwaites needs no invitation to come and see such old friends as we are, wherever we may be," quickly added Mrs. Waters.

How beautifully considerate her mother was of every body's feelings! thought Emmy— every body's, though indeed John Thwaites had always been a favorite. Well, it was odd, perhaps, what any one could see in John Thwaites, but certainly her mother was an angel. And Emmy glanced up with a little look of filial admiration.

But as she raised her eyes she met those of John Thwaites, and had to lower them again instantly. Even then she was slightly troubled by the recollection of his look—such a sad, strange look it had been—a look seeming, as it were, to come to her from afar, across a great chasm. She could not help being rather sorry, and yet, sorry as she might be, her feelings were not without a little flavor of gratification. There is something pleasant in the consciousness of being sighed after as a bright particular star too far off for mortal attainment—pleasant, even though one may be one's self a little in the sighing mood too.

He sat a short time longer, listening to her father's plans for the new house, and though Emmy never again ventured to raise her eyes she did not lose that impression which his look had given her, of a great chasm being between them—a chasm which seemed to be ever widening.

At last he rose; a form of leaving-taking was got through, in what fashion Emmy hardly knew; and he was gone. For a little while she felt rather dull and listless, but she had too many things

to think of to be out of spirits long, and quickly recovered herself.

John Thwaites's congratulations were not the last received that day. An hour or two later a note was delivered, addressed to Emmy, and couched as follows:

"Egerton Park, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR EMMY,—I know how much you must all be occupied to-day, and therefore have not troubled you with a call, else you may be sure that the news I heard this morning would have brought me to you with all speed. Most heartily, my dear girl, do I congratulate you and all of you on your good fortune, and most heartily do I wish that with it (perhaps I ought rather to say in spite of it, but you would not agree with me then) may be bestowed every blessing that can make life happy. When I hear that you are a little at leisure I will come and see you, and offer my congratulations in person, as I am longing to do; meanwhile, with best regards to your father and mother, believe me ever, my dear Emmy, your affectionate friend,

"OLIVIA EGERTON."

"A very kind letter," commented Emmy, as she finished reading it to her father and mother. "But how funny to see her always pretending to despise money! The idea of wishing that one may be happy in spite of one's good fortune!"

"I should have thought she would have been above a piece of conventional cant like that," disdainfully said Austin Waters.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. TOVEY.

A WEEK and a day had passed, and the young spring sun was shining brightly into Austin Waters's house, the blinds of which, no longer pulled down in decorous symbolism of the mourning within, were drawn up to the top as though to admit a double share of light and cheerfulness.

The funeral had taken place the day before, and a very magnificent and impressive funeral it had been. All the shops of the place had been shut during the ceremony (not that the deceased had ever been a specially good customer to any of them, but as a mark of respect, people said), the church was draped in black cloth at fifteen shillings the yard, and all the charity-school children were turned out in mourning. Mr. Jupp, happening for a few minutes to be alone with Austin in the dreary parlor at Chorcombe Lodge after the other mourners had departed, declared almost with tears in his eyes that never in the whole course of his experience had he known an affair of the kind to go off so well.

Nor was this all that Mr. Jupp took an opportunity of saying. By some means or other the conversation turned on the alterations required to make the house habitable, and Austin having made a casual inquiry as to what length of time they might be expected to occupy, Mr. Jupp answered:

"Well, really, sir—that depends so very much on the expedition of the parties to whom the arrangements might be intrusted. There's my cousin Mr. Tovey, for instance—you were think-

g of him the other day, I believe—he is particularly noted for his speed in executing contracts—the kind. Would you wish me to drop him a line about it, sir? just by way of consulting him.”

“You—you are very kind,” said Austin, a little confused. “I should like it very much indeed, only— The fact is, I was mentioning the matter to Mr. Podmore the other day, and he seemed to have somebody in his eye who— Do you know any thing about it, then?” he inquired, speaking off, for Mr. Jupp was slowly shaking his head from side to side with a bland smile as though of pity for the infirmities of human nature.

“Mr. Podmore has a relation in the building—ne, sir,” replied Mr. Jupp, still with the same bland smile. “His wife’s brother-in-law, to my own certain knowledge. Mind, not that I blame Mr. Podmore for a moment; he thinks he is doing the best for you, no doubt. But we are all aware that there is such a thing as being blinded by prejudice.”

“I see,” said Austin. “Then you wouldn’t advise—”

Mr. Jupp shook his head again, more vigorously this time.

“There is nobody living more upright than Mr. Podmore, I am confident. But you can’t trust people to be impartial when they are pushing their own relations, can you, sir?”

“I am so glad I mentioned the subject to you, Mr. Jupp. And are you sure you can recommend this Mr. Tovey, then?”

“Perfectly certain of it, sir. I don’t believe you would find any one to come near him either for efficiency, economy, or dispatch. But of course, if you wish to employ Mr. Podmore’s friend—”

“But I don’t,” said Austin emphatically. “I intend to do what is best for my own interests without being dictated to by Mr. Podmore or any body else. You can tell your cousin that I place the business in his hands, Mr. Jupp.”

“Thank you, sir; he will be very much obliged to you, I am sure. You would like to see him in the course of a few days, I suppose?”

“Yes, the sooner the better. I want the thing set about at once.”

“Perhaps he might manage to run over to-morrow, sir. My letter would be delivered in Bristol the first thing in the morning, you see, so that, supposing he has no previous engagement, he might be here by twelve or one o’clock if you wished it.”

“I should be very glad indeed, Mr. Jupp. Let him come as soon as he possibly can.”

And so the matter had been settled.

The next day came—the day on which it was permissible to pull up the blinds again—and as the hour approached at which Mr. Tovey might be expected, Austin and his family were all assembled in the shabby little parlor with which they were still fain to be content, and which looked shabbier than ever now; at least so Emmy thought, as she glanced down at the rich black silk in which her little figure was enveloped.

They had not been waiting long when Mr. Tovey was shown in—a spruce little man somewhere about forty-five years old, of trim cleanly cut figure, albeit slightly inclined to expansiveness, clear ruddy complexion, wide-awake-look-

ing blue eyes, and fair flowing whiskers just beginning to be touched with gray. He bowed politely to the master of the house, and with a certain air of gallantry to the ladies, and then, having taken a chair according to invitation and broken the ice by a casual remark on the weather, he opened the business thus:

“Ahem. I believe, Mr. Waters, you wished to see me with reference to some little alterations you were thinking of making in Chorcombe Lodge. Ah! a very fine situation, to be sure; I was studying it on my way from the station, and I never saw finer capabilities in my life.”

“I am very glad you think so,” said Austin, with much gratification. “And now what exactly would you recommend?”

“That depends principally on the sort of thing you wish done, Mr. Waters. If you and the ladies would be kind enough to favor me with your ideas—”

“I don’t understand much about building myself,” said Austin modestly. “I was thinking of wings and a cupola, and perhaps a Grecian portico or something of that sort. But I should leave it very much in your hands.”

“Ah! I see; given the existing building as a basis, and then do the best we can—just so.” Mr. Tovey considered a few seconds, and then, tapping his forehead triumphantly, resumed:—

“I know the exact thing that would suit you; I have it in my head like a map. Two wings—two stories high—long in proportion—with pillars in front forming colonnade; new façade for centre building, with lofty Corinthian pillars supporting sculptured pediment—the very thing.”

“Upon my word, I think you have hit it,” said Austin admiringly.

“What a magnificent design!” commented Emmy. “Is it not, mamma?”

But its magnificence appeared to have fairly overpowered Mrs. Waters, who was silent, as though almost dismayed by so much grandeur of conception. Presently she said timidly:

“The only thing is, it seems to me hardly worth while, with our small family, to go to so much expense—”

“Oh! of course if expense is an object—” said Mr. Tovey.

“Expense is no object,” interrupted Austin with some haughtiness. “Pray go on, Mr. Tovey.”

“I don’t know if I can elucidate my meaning further by words, really. If you would be kind enough to let me have a sheet of paper and a pencil—”

Emmy sprang up to look for what was wanted, and Mr. Tovey began to take off his gloves by way of preparation.

“Strange news this is from Beacon Bay, sir,” he remarked as he unfastened with some difficulty a refractory button.

Beacon Bay—the place may not be marked so in all maps—was the name of an estate on the coast about seven or eight miles from Chorcombe.

“From Beacon Bay!” said Austin. “Dear me, I have not heard yet.”

“What! not heard that the property is to be disposed of?” rejoined Mr. Tovey, slowly tugging at the finger-ends of his gloves. “Yes, all in the market—every square foot of it. Ah! what investment for somebody!”

Here Emmy laid the desiderated paper and pencil on the table, but as Mr. Tovey had still a glove to get off he naturally went on with what he was saying:

"Poor Mr. Newbold! he is very much to be pitied for having to part with it, but when people have no choice—I suppose if he could have kept it he would have been the richest man in England before five years are over."

"What!" exclaimed Austin, in surprise. "Why, you don't mean to say such land as that—"

"Oh! as for the land, that's nothing, but have you not heard about this new railway? Beacon Bay is to be brought into direct communication with London by a branch from Chorcombe, and then they talk of a pier and line of steamers to America. Why, the place will be one of the first ports of the kingdom in half a dozen years. Look at its natural advantages—look at its formation, look at its position."

"Very true," acquiesced Austin with rather a puzzled air.

Mr. Tovey had got off both his gloves now, but he had become too much interested in his subject not to follow it up.

"And then, while it rises into a great harbor at one end, it will rise into a fashionable watering-place at the other. Think of that hill to the west, and fancy it laid out in crescents and terraces, with villas dotted about here and there for effect—it might be made the model town of the British empire."

And as he thus spoke a certain fire of prophecy lighted up Mr. Tovey's eyes, and his ruddy face beamed ruddier still with the glow of artistic inspiration.

"Ah! a sublime idea!" he murmured in a lower tone. "And what a fortune to its promoters!"

"It might turn out very well, of course," put in Mrs. Waters with a glance at her husband.

"But I am afraid there is a great deal of risk in all such things."

Mr. Tovey looked at the speaker, and his smooth upper-lip was contracted by a slight involuntary curl. But he answered with his usual urbanity:

"Nothing in this world is done without risk, madam—or so-called risk, at least. Look at all the great fortunes of the age. But it stands to reason that different minds should be differently constituted, and a good thing too, he! If every body was equally enterprising, nobody would have an advantage, you know."

"And is it quite certain this railway is going to be made?" inquired Austin.

"Oh! for that matter you may say it's as good as made already. The chairman and principal directors have set their hearts on it."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Waters, "you are surely not thinking—"

"Of course not," answered her husband rather tartly. "I wonder what put such a thing into your head. I only asked the question casually, and so Mr. Tovey understood it, I am certain."

"Oh! dear me, yes, I understood it perfectly, sir," said Mr. Tovey, putting his gloves together and taking up the pencil, "and I am sure as for ever expecting or thinking of any thing else—I make a point of mentioning the subject wherever I go, because I think it is right that when there is

such an opportunity people should know of it, but of course it is nothing to me whether they take it up or not, and I don't expect that they should. Let me see, this is the house as it stands at present"—here he drew a few rapid lines.

"Now on this side I propose to throw out a wing—so—and on this other side another wing—so—with a colonnade all the way along—so—and then add another story to the centre—so—to give it a suitable predominance over the wings, you see—and in front a façade of pillars—there, that's something like what I mean."

"Oh! how grand it will be!" cried Emmy enthusiastically, as Mr. Tovey displayed the paper on which he had thus developed his idea.

"But don't you think," suggested Mrs. Waters, "that if the wings were not quite so long, and of one story each—"

"(Of course I could make them any size you like," replied Mr. Tovey with another slight curl of the lip—"only it would completely spoil the whole thing. For look here—and I should like you to look too, Miss Waters, please—we want the wings to remedy the defects of the original, don't we? Very well, the principal defect of the original is, that though the rooms are of a tolerable size, there is no suite fit for a grand entertainment, say a ball or concert, such as a great county family must sometimes give—ah! I am sure the young lady will agree with me there. Then we have nothing for it, you understand, but to make such a suite in one of the wings; therefore one of the wings must be long, therefore it must be correspondingly high, therefore the other wing must be just like it, therefore the centre must be raised in proportion—all a matter of sheer necessity, you see. I don't know if I have expressed myself clearly."

"Oh! but indeed you have," said Emmy. "I thoroughly understand, don't you, mamma? There is really nothing else to be done."

Mrs. Waters still looked not altogether convinced, and Mr. Tovey with an imperceptible shrug turned to address himself to her husband.

"Might I ask if the plan meets your approval, sir?"

"Oh yes! I think so—yes—indeed, as you say, there is evidently nothing else—And within what time do you think it could be finished?"

"I will make the necessary calculations, and let you know all particulars as soon as possible, sir. Of course I can give no details at present—on this head or any other—but you may depend on my doing my best to unite both expedition and economy."

"Thank you, Mr. Tovey. You see it is very awkward having no settled home of our own—"

"Oh! very—I quite appreciate that," said Mr. Tovey sympathizingly, beginning to draw on his gloves. "I suppose you are thinking of a furnished house in the mean time?"

"Yes," said Austin. "Oh! we intend to clear out of this hole immediately."

"In the neighborhood, sir, I suppose you would wish it?"

"Certainly, I shall have business to transact with Mr. Podmore for a long time to come. But have you any object—"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I was just thinking of a house that I fancy I have heard my cousin Mr. Jupp speak of, which would be the very place for you. I am afraid it's hardly fair of me,

for I happen to know there is a party very hot on it, but it seems so exactly suited—The Laurels—you know the Laurels, surely—at the corner of the old London road. A very complete residence, sir—stables, coach-house, and all that, of course—and elegantly furnished, in all respects adapted to a family of distinction."

"I'll speak to Mr. Jupp about it this afternoon," said Austin decisively. "We could move into it at once, I suppose?"

"Not just directly, I am afraid, Mr. Waters, but almost. I think Mr. Jupp said something about the tenants leaving in a month."

"A month!" exclaimed Austin in consternation.

"It will be vacant sooner than any other house on Mr. Jupp's list, sir."

"And are we to be kept waiting a month in this hole—I and my wife and daughter—to please Mr. Jupp?" asked Austin angrily.

"But if there is no other suitable house in the whole neighborhood, sir," deprecatingly said Mr. Tovey. "I am very sorry for the inconvenience, I'm sure, and if I could think of some other way—Stop, I wonder if Mrs. and Miss Waters would object to run down to the sea-side for a few weeks—nothing like sea air for the roses on a lady's cheek, they say, and after the trial they have sustained I should think it was just the thing for them."

"It would be very nice indeed," said Emmy, seeing that she seemed to be more especially appealed to.

"I knew the ladies would like it," rejoined Mr. Tovey triumphantly. "And there you see what an advantage it would be to have a new marine city at Beacon Bay; it would be exactly what you would like just now—a convenient sea-side residence almost within reach of home. But as it is, I suppose you must just try one of the regular watering-places."

"I should not like one of the regular watering-places at all," said Mrs. Waters, looking at her husband. "If we could find some quiet sea-side place where we might all rest for a few weeks, with nobody to speak to—"

"Ah yes! and recruit for the fatiguing social duties that will be in store when you come home," said Mr. Tovey, with a consolatory glance at Emmy, who was looking a little crest-fallen.

"Upon my word, it's a good plan to take the opportunity of rest when you can get it, for you would not be able to join in any gayeties just at present, of course, whereas afterwards you will be perfectly overwhelmed. The exigencies of your position, you know. Well, if a quiet place is what you wish, I can lay my finger on the precise locality to suit you—a little sea-port in Dorsetshire where Mrs. Tovey and the children were last year" (he mentioned the name of a small fishing-village which shall here be called Nidbourne)—"an enchanting spot, with cliffs, and trees, and hill and dale, and purling brooks, and the rest of it, and such sea-breezes, oh! a perfect paradise. And if you don't like the fuss and trouble of regular lodgings, there's my wife's sister, Mrs. Sawyer, who lives there, and would be only too happy to give up half her house to you—a sweet little villa not five minutes from the beach—and would make you as snug as snug. What do you say, ladies, not a bad idea, eh?"

"I think I could be very happy there for a few

weeks," said Mrs. Waters rather wistfully. "If only you, Austin dear, are quite sure you would enjoy it—"

"I!" answered her husband. "Oh! but it is impossible I can go anywhere just now. For one thing, I have got so much to arrange with Mr. Podmore, and then I must stop and look after the building and so on. Why, you might know I am over head and ears in business."

"You are going to stay here, Austin! Oh! then we will stay here too. We never could think of going away to enjoy ourselves and leaving you behind."

"Oh! but Mr. Waters will enjoy himself too, never fear for that," said Mr. Tovey cheerily. "You would find very fair bachelor accommodation, sir, at the Brown Bear," he went on, addressing Austin; "it's where I always put up myself, and upon my word it's very fair indeed. But it would be *infra dig.* for ladies, of course—so unless you thought of stopping in this house—"

"Quite out of the question," interrupted Austin.

"But why should it be, dear?" pleaded his wife.

"Because I don't choose to live in such a cursed den when I can get out of it," he retorted sharply.

"You know, mamma dear, we really couldn't," expostulated Emmy.

"Well, positively I confess I do not see how you very well could," said Mr. Tovey. "And in that case, ladies, upon my word I think you'll find my plan the best. And look at the benefit you will derive from the sea air."

"Oh yes! mamma," put in Emmy; "it will do you all the good in the world."

"Of course it will," said Austin. "It is the very thing you need."

The upshot was that Mrs. Waters at last gave a reluctant promise to think the matter over; and Mr. Tovey shortly afterwards went away, perhaps understanding that it would be more judicious not to press the point further for that day.

Emmy appeared to consider the point as good as carried already, for no sooner was the stranger gone than she began descanting on the journey to Dorsetshire, and the sea, and the villa not five minutes from the beach, with a zest which showed that she had fairly set her heart on the expedition. It must be remembered that she had never been ten miles from Chorcombe in her life. But Mrs. Waters was evidently not yet reconciled to the project. Perhaps she understood that argument was of no use against Emmy's impetuosity, for she made no attempt at further protest while the girl was present, merely listening to her rapturous outpourings with a quiet smile. But the first time that her daughter was out of the room she looked uneasily up from her work, and said:

"I should be much happier to stay with you, Austin."

"I wish you could, I'm sure. But you see there is really no choice."

Mrs. Waters sighed, perhaps thinking it rather hard that the first effect of wealth should be to force her away from the husband from whom in poverty she had never been a day parted. She continued to work a little while in silence, the first casting a quick apprehensive glance round the room, resumed nervously:

"That letter you brought from Bristol the other day—it shows he is really thinking of coming over. And if it was to be while we were away—"

"Oh! but that would make no difference," said her husband hurriedly. "It would be as easy at that place in Dorsetshire as here, you know—better, indeed—yes, now that I think of it, I have no doubt he would very much prefer it."

"Would you not like to see him too, then?" said Mrs. Waters sadly.

"I? Oh yes! of course, of all things. But I could run down on a flying visit as often as I wished—there, that will do; the thing is settled, and I don't see the use of unsettling it."

Still the wife did not seem satisfied. But before she had time to say more, an interruption occurred the nature of which must be recorded in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

KIND FRIENDS.

"Oh! if you please, mum, here's a gentleman as says he's got something to show you."

So spoke the rough untutored voice of the char-woman, and immediately afterwards another voice—a very soft, suave one this time—was heard saying:

"If you don't regard the intrusion as too great a liberty, madam."

And behind the uncouth figure of the char-woman there appeared a well-dressed dapper personage of rather foreign appearance, with smooth, clean-shaven mouth and chin, dark hair and whiskers, and black bead-like eyes slightly drawn upwards at the outer corners. A massive Albert chain, with a large bunch of charms, was stretched across his waistcoat, and assisted Mrs. Waters in recognizing him as a Mr. Mossman, proprietor of a flashy-looking jeweller and silversmith's shop, which, with a pawnbroker's business attached, had been recently opened in the old-fashioned village High Street.

"Would you allow me, madam?" he said, gently raising his hand, in which he held a large flat parcel. "It has occurred to me that perhaps at such a time as this it might be a convenience to you to look over a selection of some of our superfine jet ornaments, so much in vogue at the present day among ladies of fashion, whether in or out of mourning."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Waters. "But really I am sorry you have had the trouble, for I am afraid—"

"Trouble, madam! don't mention such a thing. I would not have presumed to take the liberty, only ladies are apt to think it impossible to obtain first-class articles of the kind in a country-place, and it seems a pity that they should be exposed to the inconvenience and delay of sending to London for what they want, when it can be had as good or better on the spot. Ah! I ought to feel very much honored when I think how much annoyance my little establishment has been the means of sparing the ladies of our local aristocracy."

"Are you sure you would not like to look at some of the things?" Austin asked his wife.

"No, thank you, dear, I would really rather

not." Mrs. Waters was not given to be prejudiced against any one, but she could not help feeling an instinctive dislike to Mr. Mossman.

Here Emmy re-entered the room, casting a surprised glance towards the stranger, whom she did not at first recognize.

"A—a person who has brought some things for your mamma to look at, my dear," said her father, in explanation.

"Perhaps the young lady would like to inspect them," put in Mr. Mossman, eagerly. "A few very choice jet ornaments, suitable for fashionable mourning. Allow me to have the honor of showing them, miss; any decision you may or may not come to as to a purchase is quite a minor consideration with me, I assure you."

Emmy looked at her father, and, receiving a sign of approval, drew near the table with manifest interest, while Mr. Mossman proceeded to open out his parcel.

"It is always a pleasure to submit my articles to be inspected by ladies of taste, miss, because in such quarters I know they are always sure to be appreciated, and that is a sufficient gratification in itself for parties with any feeling for their business. Now here is an elegant set—necklet and bracelets, you see, ladies—first quality, with gold mountings, oh! altogether a sweet article. I never had but two of the pattern, and the other was ordered last week for a lady of title whose name I am not at liberty to mention. You have no idea of the effect, ladies—on a white arm, you know. If you would just allow me to try this bracelet on you, miss—"

Emmy looked again at her father, who smiled and nodded, and immediately one of the bracelets was fastened on her plump, round little wrist.

"There, ladies! Well, upon my word I never had an idea of the full effect of a jet ornament till now."

"It is a very pretty pattern, certainly," said Emmy, in evident admiration.

"I have not seen a set to compare with it this season," declared Mr. Mossman. "And at such a price too—why, it is ridiculous almost—only eighty-four shillings for the whole set. Gold mountings, you will remember, and attached to the necklet is a little locket for hair or other such memorial—use as well as ornament, you perceive. And so remarkably fashionable at the present crisis."

"Would you like it, Emmy?" inquired Austin, finding his daughter's eyes once more turned towards him.

"I think I should very much, please, papa."

"That is quite enough, my dear," said the father, producing his purse, which an advance from Mr. Podmore had replenished. "And now, Agnes, you must choose something too—come."

"Oh yes! indeed you must, mamma."

Poor Mrs. Waters protested that she needed nothing, but her protestations were of no avail, and the result was that between five and six pounds passed from Austin's pocket into Mr. Mossman's. As may be supposed, Mr. Mossman was profuse in his expressions of gratitude.

"So very much obliged for your kind patronage, sir," he said, as he tied up his parcel again.

"It is an honor which will do me a great deal of good in the neighborhood when it becomes known. If you ever happen to have any further

commands for me, ladies— All kinds of jewelry made and repaired, and watch-making in all its branches— In fact, that is a line in which we give particular satisfaction, and I am glad to say are making quite a connection among the chief county families."

"Oh, indeed!" said Emmy, for the information seemed to be addressed to her more specially than to any body else.

"Yes, I can assure you. Why, this very afternoon I have an appointment with a lady of rank near Bristol— If you will allow me, miss, I ought to have the little article somewhere about me now, if only I have not forgotten it. I should just like you to see it as a specimen of what we can do."

He fumbled in his pocket, and at last succeeded in finding a small morocco case, out of which he presently drew a lady's watch and chain.

"An exquisite piece of workmanship, miss, I flatter myself. Would you do me the honor of inspecting it?"

"Oh! what a lovely little watch!" said Emmy, examining it reverently. "Look, papa, this is something like Miss Egerton's that I was telling you of—the one the Clare Court people gave her, you know—only on the back of it she has her initials set in brilliants. And, oh! you have no idea how splendid it looks."

"I know exactly the kind of thing you mean, miss," politely put in Mr. Mossman. "Indeed it was only last week I sent home an article precisely such as you describe to one of our principal customers. It certainly has a very sweet effect."

"What would you say, Emmy, if I were to make you a present of a watch just like Miss Egerton's?" inquired her father.

"Papa!" cried Emmy, hardly believing her own ears, "but you are joking, surely. Why, Miss Egerton's watch cost ever so much."

"Joking! what should make you think I am joking?" said Austin, a little sharply. "How soon do you think you could let us have it if I were to give the order, Mr. Mossman—a watch something like that, with chain and all complete, of course, and the initials E. W. set in brilliants on the back?"

"I couldn't say to a day, sir. But I should hope before the end of the week—"

"Mr. Podmore, please, sir," said the voice of the char-woman.

And in the next moment there appeared Mr. Podmore himself, who, having been one of the mourners yesterday, had called to inquire after the health of the family.

He shook hands courteously with every body until he came to Mr. Mossman, at sight of whom his ponderous judicial-looking countenance darkened visibly, while with some sternness he remarked:

"Ah! Mr. Mossman! I did not know you had customers in this house."

"Mrs. and Miss Waters have been kind enough to examine a few little articles of mine, sir," replied Mr. Mossman, gathering his property together in some haste. "I have the honor to wish you a very good day, ladies—a very good day, sir." And, with a low bow to each of his patrons, Mr. Mossman made a respectful exit.

"You have not let that fellow talk you over into buying any of his trumpery, I hope," began

the lawyer as soon as the door was closed. "He is one of the greatest—ahem, I needn't say more. But I should not advise you to have any thing to do with him."

"My wife and daughter have made one or two little purchases," said Austin, reluctantly, "but nothing of consequence. Does he really bear such a bad character, then?"

Mr. Podmore shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Who would have thought it!" exclaimed Emmy, in horror. "And to think how near you were giving him an order for a watch and chain, papa! How very fortunate that Mr. Podmore came in just when he did!"

"Well, if you were near giving him an order for a watch and chain, I should say it was rather fortunate, certainly," observed Mr. Podmore dryly.

"We ought to be very much obliged to you, I am sure," said Mrs. Waters, answering for her husband.

"Oh yes! very much obliged," acquiesced Austin. But somehow he did not feel quite so expansively grateful to Mr. Podmore as he ought to have done. He was glad to be rescued from the further wiles of Mr. Mossman, of course, but it was not pleasant to find that he had been in need of rescue, and he was beset by an uneasy feeling that Mr. Podmore was beginning to take the command of him.

"I hope I see Mrs. and Miss Waters pretty well to-day?" inquired Mr. Podmore, addressing himself to the ladies in his most gallant manner. "Delightful weather, is it not? You must try to get out for a little walk this lovely afternoon; it is just what you want after staying so long in doors."

"I am going to send them to the sea-side," said Austin, not sorry to let the lawyer see that he was capable of taking so important a decision on his own responsibility.

"Indeed!" remarked Mr. Podmore. "And are the ladies going to make a long stay?"

"About a month, I think—till the Laurels can be got ready. I have arranged to take the Laurels furnished for a few months, just while the building is going on."

"Ah yes! the building at Chorcombe Lodge," said Mr. Podmore graciously; "you were consulting me about it the other day, I remember. And I believe I mentioned that I could recommend—"

"Thank you," replied Austin with some internal exultation; "but all that is settled already. Mr. Tovey—Mr. Jupp's cousin he is—has been here this morning, and I have placed the matter entirely in his hands."

"Oh! Mr. Jupp's cousin!" said Mr. Podmore, with a visible contraction of the brows. "He called here of his own accord, do you mean?"

"He called here by appointment with me," answered Austin.

"Oh!" said Mr. Podmore, with another contraction of the brows, so prolonged that Austin almost expected an overt expression of dissatisfaction. But if Mr. Podmore had any intention of the kind he thought better of it, and gradually permitted his forehead to smoothen itself out again.

"Of course, Mr. Waters, that is an affair entirely within your own control" ("I should see so, indeed," thought Austin indignantly). "a

I have only to hope that you may have every reason to be satisfied with the arrangement."

"I hope so too," responded Austin, a little stiffly, for it seemed to him that Mr. Podmore's expression of hope was nearly tantamount to an implication of doubt.

At this juncture the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of more visitors. This time it was the Rev. Mr. Elkins and Mrs. Elkins who came to pay the tribute of their sympathies and inquiries.

The Rev. Mr. Elkins, the parish clergyman of Chorcombe, was a tall, thin, parsonic-looking man with straight nose, long flat upper lip, scanty hair and whiskers, and weak gray eyes. Mrs. Elkins was tall and thin also, and as parsonic-looking as it is possible for a lady to be, with tight pinched features, high cheek-bones, and dark iron-gray hair growing half way down her forehead, and arranged in long corkscrew ringlets on each side of her face. It was the first time that she had ever entered that humble parlor, but she advanced to shake hands with the inmates as graciously as though she had been at home there all her life.

"How do you do, Mrs. Waters? how do you do, Miss Waters? I hope you are both a little better to-day. Ah!" She accompanied the last words with a slight sigh and a gentle shake of the corkscrew ringlets.

Mrs. Waters and Emmy murmured something about being pretty well, and then, salutations having been duly exchanged with Austin and Mr. Podmore, the whole party got themselves seated—with some little difficulty and confusion, owing to the smallness of the room.

There was a solemn pause, solemnly broken by the Rev. Mr. Elkins.

"Mrs. Elkins and I could not be satisfied without coming to see how you were after your trial. Ah dear! his loss makes a sad blank in our little circle—a sad blank, does it not, Mr. Podmore?"

"Indeed it does," said Mr. Podmore, pulling as long a face as possible.

"And if we, who were comparative strangers, miss him so much, how infinitely more must he be missed by those to whom he stood on the footing of a near and dear kinsman!" pursued Mr. Elkins, with a sympathizing look towards the bereaved relatives. "Well, it is the common lot—the common lot."

"In the midst of life we are in death," sighed Mrs. Elkins.

"Ah! that is a truth of which we are indeed forcibly reminded on these melancholy occasions," rejoined her husband, unctuously. "Life is but a span—threescore-and-ten years, and how quickly they are gone!"

Austin could not help reflecting that in his uncle's case the threescore-and-ten had meant eighty-six, but he did not say so, and managed to answer the appeal with a sign of assent.

Perhaps Mr. Elkins thought that it was the pressure of emotion which kept the mourner silent; for he resumed, soothingly:

"But you must remember that what has been his loss has been your—What has been your loss has been his gain, I mean. Ah! a precious consolation, to be sure! And if it can be any mitigation of your grief to know how widely it is *shared and sympathized with by all classes*—

There never was a memory more universally respected—never."

Austin bowed; as his uncle's heir and representative he felt such an assurance to be somehow personally gratifying and complimentary.

"Oh! it is quite remarkable," declared Mr. Elkins. "Indeed, I have been considering whether it would not be almost a duty, where so much respect is felt, to organize it into some tangible shape."

Austin looked perplexed.

"A memorial window, or something of that kind, I was thinking of," the clergyman explained. "If the nucleus of a fund were once formed I am confident that I could obtain quite fifty names for smaller sums—very small sums I dare say they might be, but they would show the spirit of the givers, and that is the principal thing, we all know. And if it would be any gratification to your feelings to put up any little memorial of the sort, I should be very happy to allow it to be associated with Chorcombe church."

"You are very kind," said Austin, gratefully; for, though the proposal was rather a bore than otherwise, he felt that Mr. Elkins was paying him a great compliment. "Really I think it might be a very good plan."

"I knew the idea would please you, Mr. Waters. And what do you think, then, if the large window in the transept—"

"The large window in the transept?" put in Mr. Podmore, a little abruptly, "That will come to a good bit of money, won't it?"

"I could not say exactly," replied Mr. Elkins mildly, yet not without a slight accent of reproof. "But it will be easy to make preliminary inquiries in the proper quarters, and if Mr. Waters thought the estimate too high—"

"But I should think nothing of the kind," said Austin with a reproachful glance at Mr. Podmore for exposing him to so injurious an imputation. "Of course in such a matter I should never dream of grudging any necessary expense."

"But excuse me, Mr. Waters," persisted the lawyer, "you see this is not a necessary expense at all. Those stained windows cost no end of money; and, for my part, I don't see what's the good of them except to keep out daylight."

"Oh, Mr. Podmore!" exclaimed the clergyman's wife, in simpering horror at such an avowal of barbarism. "How can you say such a thing—one of the chief ornaments of ecclesiastical architecture, you know. Well, I am sure Mr. Elkins and I are constantly remarking to each other that a stained window is just the one thing wanted to make our church what it ought to be."

"Oh! it will be an improvement to your church, no doubt," said Mr. Podmore, coldly.

"And the church shall have it too," rejoined Austin, emphatically, with a look of defiance in the direction of the lawyer. Well, at all events, Mr. and Mrs. Elkins would see that though he was Mr. Podmore's client he was not held in leading-strings by him.

Mr. Elkins expressed his gratification that his little suggestion for honoring the memory of his departed friend should have met with so much approbation; and then the conversation wandered off to other topics—the alterations in Chorcombe Lodge, the Laurels, the sea-side village in Dorsetshire, and Mrs. Elkins's ardent hope that after

their return she would have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. and Miss Waters very often. After a due time spent thus, during which Mr. Podmore showed no signs of moving (was the man staying to take care of him? Austin once or twice wondered), Mr. and Mrs. Elkins rose to go. Then, and not till then, Mr. Podmore rose too, and the family trio were once more left sole occupants of the little parlor.

But they had not been long alone when yet another visitor was announced—this time, however, not such an unfamiliar one as those that had just departed, being no other than Olivia Egerton.

She had already been to see her friends during the week of their seclusion, so on the present occasion did not think it necessary to begin either with congratulation or condolence, making her greetings very much as if nothing had happened.

"I have just called to have a little peep at you all on my way home," she said, as she took the chair which Emmy had flown to fetch with all her old alacrity. "I am so glad you are alone; it would have spoilt the pleasure sadly if any body had been with you, especially such people as those Elkinses. I met them coming from your house just now; I suppose they have been making all sorts of pretty speeches."

"They were very kind and polite, certainly," said Austin, who secretly thought Mr. and Mrs. Elkins very nice people indeed, and Miss Egerton's implied distrust of them absurdly unfounded.

"Kind and polite! Well, that is the most charitable way of putting it, at all events, and perhaps it is very ungrateful of me not to put it so too, for I am sure they have been kind enough and polite enough to me, in all conscience. But then I have an uncomfortable fancy all the while that they would not have been nearly so gushing if they had known me in the old time when I was pupil-teacher at Miss Lalande's."

"I almost wonder you care for remembering that time now," remarked Austin gravely. Miss Egerton's fondness for alluding to the details of her past life had always struck him as strangely undignified, and now that circumstances had made him her equal, he thought it only friendly to venture on a mild expostulation.

"What! Mr. Waters, would you have me so thankless as to forget the happiest days of my whole life only because they were the days of my poverty?"

"If they were the days of your poverty, I hardly see how they can have been the happiest of your life," said Austin, politely, but with a good deal of internal scorn for what seemed to him a rank piece of conventional hypocrisy and affectation.

"Ah! but then there was this charm about the days of my poverty; that they were such gloriously hard-working, busy days. I was of some use in those times, and it is so delicious to feel one's self of use. Upon my word, it was great fun—always something to think of, always something to try for—the multiplication-table to hammer into Miss Jones, and the French verbs into Miss Smith, and my own practising to squeeze in—I never was in want of subjects of interest then. I was useful, that's the long and short of it—*useful to Miss Jones and Miss Smith, at all events; and it is always pleasant to be*

spending one's days usefully, even if they are only days of poverty."

Austin was silent. He thought of the days of his poverty and how he had spent them—watching the smoke as it curled up the chimney, or counting the rain-drops as they pattered against the window, or at the best taking aimless walks in and about the village and listening to idle local gossip—and knew that he was not qualified to argue the question. And then for a moment there came, as it were, wafted across his memory a reminiscence of the far-off days when he was a hard-working clerk in a Liverpool office, as hard-working even as the pupil-teacher in her school, and he was almost ready to acquit Miss Egerton of affectation, after all.

Probably it occurred to Olivia to remember how different his experience had been from her own, for she made rather a sudden change of subject, turning round abruptly to ask Emmy:

"Well, Emmy dear, how are you getting on? You must be thinking of beginning your practising again soon; I have been missing you dreadfully for the last week."

"Thank you, dear Miss Egerton, I have missed you very much too. But I am afraid I shall not be able to begin again just for the present. Mamma and I are going to spend a few weeks at the sea-side."

"You and your mamma! By yourselves?" asked Olivia, in some surprise, for she had never known a separation in the family before.

"Papa is not able to go," explained Emmy. "So mamma and I are to stay by ourselves at a dear little village that has been recommended to us in Dorsetshire, to wait till the Laurels—Oh! I forgot, you don't know any thing about that: we are to live at the Laurels while the building is going on. And oh! what do you think—we have had Mr. Tovey the architect with us this morning, and he says—"

And here Emmy flew off at a tangent to expatiate eloquently on the grandeur of Mr. Tovey's ideas, and it was not till this topic was exhausted that she returned to the subject of the dear little village in Dorsetshire and expatiated with equal eloquence on that. Mrs. Waters murmured one or two hesitating objections against a scheme to which she was still only half reconciled, but she was soon completely vanquished by the arguments which her husband and daughter jointly brought to bear on her; and Emmy was left mistress of the situation, to describe the imagined charms of Nidbourne in her own way. This she did with the greater gusto as she saw Miss Egerton listening with more than usual appearance of interest.

"I declare, child, you have been talking about the sea till you have made me quite long for it," said Olivia at last, as Emmy came to a pause from sheer want of breath. "If you and your mamma have really decided to go to this place, I wonder if you would have any objection to let me go with you?"

"You, Miss Egerton!" cried Emmy, in ecstasy. "Do you really mean?"

"Yes, I think this Nidbourne would be just the nice little place I should like to rusticate in for a few weeks. And then, you see, going with you I should get a holiday from Mrs. Waddilove" (Mrs. Waddilove was Olivia's companion), "and that will really be a great comfort, to say nothing

of the comfort it will probably be to poor Mrs. Waddilove to get a holiday from me. So if you are sure you would quite like it—"

"Like it!" exclaimed Emmy. "Oh! Miss Egerton, it will be delicious."

"It would make us both a great deal happier," said Mrs. Waters, who, reluctant as she was to leave home, felt that absence would at all events be more endurable in the companionship of a friend like Miss Egerton.

"And for me," said Olivia, "I am sure it will be by far the best holiday I have had since Miss Lalande's time—ah! how I used to enjoy my holidays then! Not that it is to be quite a holiday either; we must try to get on with our music and drawing between the walks, you know, Emmy. Very well, we are all agreed, it seems, so we may regard the thing as quite settled."

And from that time the thing was regarded as quite settled. Mrs. Waters and Emmy were to go down to Nidbourne with their friend Miss Egerton, while Austin staid behind to give his affairs the advantage of his own personal supervision.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST DAY AT THE OLD HOME.

THE next few days were for the whole Waters family a season of unprecedented excitement and confusion. They were on the point of moving from the house which had been their home for twenty-one years; Mrs. Waters and Emmy were, moreover, preparing for their trip to Nidbourne; and in addition to all this, there were a host of minor claims on the family attention in the shape of congratulatory visits, architectural plans and estimates, business interviews with Mr. Podmore, and so on *ad infinitum*. Among other incidents of the time, a watch and chain arrived from Mr. Mossman's, accompanied by a bill for seventy guineas, which bill, with the goods, was immediately returned to him; but there were so many things of greater interest to be attended to that this little unpleasantness was scarcely thought of, and even Mr. Mossman's threats of legal proceedings passed almost unnoticed. In this state of bustle and turmoil nearly a week went by, and at length the day came which was for the present to be the last spent by Mrs. Waters and Emmy in Chorcombe.

It chanced that on the afternoon of that day Emmy was walking home by herself from Egerton Park, where she had been to make an appointment with Miss Egerton for their meeting at Chorcombe station next morning. The weather was bright and spring-like, and Emmy, tripping along the road by the side of the budding hedge-row, thinking of her approaching journey and still more of the glories awaiting her on her return, found the walk very pleasant. After a while, however, she gradually ceased to think of these things, and somehow got thinking instead—

Not that the circumstance of John Thwaites coming into her head at this juncture proved any thing, you must understand. She had just passed the opening of the lane which led down to the mill where he was a clerk, so that the train of thought really suggested itself quite naturally. And, besides, had she not that very afternoon been seeing Miss Egerton—Miss Egerton who

was always praising him up, and talking as though there was not another young man like him in all England? The idea! As if there were not loads and loads just as nice, and a great deal nicer! as if she herself did not know— But when she tried to reckon up John Thwaites's equals or superiors, somehow their names did not occur to her.

Yes, but then all the young men she knew lived in Chorcombe, and Chorcombe was only a miserable little country village. When she went to London, as her father had promised that she should, and saw all the fine gentlemen of Almack's and Rotten Row— At this point there floated before her a vision of a gallant cavalier mounted high on a curvetting steed and making a bow to her as she passed him on another—such a bow, so low and tender and reverential, as she had once seen Miss Egerton receive from her cousin Mr. Randal on that very road. When did John Thwaites ever make such a bow as that? Why, she had never seen him on horseback; she doubted even whether—

"Miss Emmy!" said somebody behind her.

She looked round with a great start, and with a greater start still saw, almost close to her side, John Thwaites himself. Considering that he was the identical person of whom she happened to have been thinking, there is no wonder that she found herself a good deal flurried.

"How do you do?" he said, in rather a low, quavering voice.

"How do you do, Mr. Thwaites?"

Hereupon they shook hands; they had been on hand-shaking terms for years, and could not possibly have done less. But her daintily-gloved little hand had scarcely touched his broad sunburnt fingers before it was released again, so that this was a ceremony very soon performed. And then came a pause, during which both were at a loss as to what to do or say next. They could hardly wish each other good-bye, seeing that both had manifestly been walking in the same direction.

"You are going home, Miss Emmy?" he asked at last, and of course she had nothing for it but to answer in the affirmative.

"I was going home too," he rejoined. "This is one of my early days for leaving."

With this they both moved onward, which was certainly a great deal less awkward than standing staring at each other in the middle of the road. But Emmy felt scarcely less flurried now than at first—it was so strange to be walking along side by side with a young man. And, besides, only fancy if any body from the village was to meet them!

They went on for some minutes without speaking—that creature John Thwaites had not a bit of tact; and Emmy was at last compelled to find something to say, just to break the silence.

"I hope mamma and I shall have fine weather for our holiday," she began. "We have arranged to go to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" he said, and his voice was still unusually tremulous. "I did not know it was to be so soon. So this is the last time I shall see you for a long while, I suppose?"

As he spoke these words there was something so profoundly melancholy in his tones that Emmy out of mere human sympathy, could not help feeling a touch of melancholy too as she replied that she supposed it was.

"I hope you will have a very pleasant time," he said, presently.

"Thank you, Mr. Thwaites," and Emmy really felt rather grateful as she made the answer, for she knew that he was speaking sincerely. "I wish the same to you, I am sure."

"To me, Miss Emmy!" He sighed, and walked on a little way in silence, then resumed: "Some people would say I ought to be pleased enough just now, for I've had a great piece of luck to-day—a piece of luck as the world goes, that is."

And then he sighed again very deeply, and Emmy felt wonderfully inclined to sigh too. But she restrained herself, and merely answered, with a little twirl of her parasol:

"Indeed! I am happy to hear it, and so will papa and mamma be, I am certain. And might I ask—"

"I am to be manager—manager with a salary of three hundred a year. Enough to keep me over and over again, you know. So I ought to be content of course."

But he was not content evidently, for he gave another sigh, and walked on with his eyes mournfully fixed on the ground.

Emmy did not know how it was, but as he thus spoke of his prospects she began to tremble all over, and had not energy left even to twirl her parasol.

"I am very glad Mr. Thwaites," she stammered. "I—I congratulate you very much."

"I should have been glad too a month ago. But I don't care about it one way or the other now."

In saying this he stole one little look towards her, a look which she felt rather than saw, and yet which, though she scarcely saw it, disturbed her strangely. Was he going to say more or not? She listened intently.

"No, I don't care now," he went on in a hoarse voice. "A month ago I should have died of joy almost. But I don't care now."

A choking sensation rose to her throat. She knew that he was in grief, and knew that she alone could comfort him. And perhaps she was not altogether indisposed to comfort him, for, happening just then to give a glance upward, she found her eyes dimmed with something like a tear. At the same moment he gave a glance upward too, and their eyes met.

She let hers drop again instantly, and bit her lip, while the blood rushed to her cheeks with shame and vexation. Did he think he had found her out, then? did he think—All that there was of rebelliousness and resistance in her nature sprang to arms at once. She felt ashamed as she had never felt ashamed before, and, because ashamed, was therefore angry—angry with herself for her momentary weakness, angry with him for having been its cause. And, as a consequence of her anger, the coquettish spirit which had been so unwontedly soft and yielding a minute ago became suddenly cased in sevenfold hardness.

"Dear me! how strange!" she said with a light, little laugh. "I should have thought promotion was as much worth caring for at one time as another."

There fell on his face a certain pained distressed look very sad to see. But Emmy did not see it, and perhaps if she had seen it would not have let it make much difference in her conduct,

"Yes, I think we shall have nice weather, really," she went on, by way of changing the subject, looking up at the clouds with as great an appearance of carelessness as she could assume. "I hope so, at least; we shall enjoy ourselves so much if only we have it fine. You never were at Nidbourne, perhaps? They say it is such a pretty place."

She forced herself to rattle on thus to cover any vestige of agitation which he might possibly notice in her manner. If she had known how agitated he was himself, she might have spared herself the trouble.

"It will be quite a delightful change for us," she continued. "And when we come back we are to live at the Laurels—till the alterations at Chorcombe Lodge can be finished, you know. I suppose you have not seen Mr. Tovey's plans yet; they look very well, really."

"Indeed!" he managed to say.

"Yes, upon my word they do. He is to make us such a beautiful long ball-room—it will be quite a pleasure to dance in it. It is an object with us to have a good ball-room, of course, for I fancy we shall be giving balls pretty often now."

She had recovered from all outward signs of agitation by this time, and had no excuse for talking thus, unless it was that there was an evil spirit in her heart which prompted her to tease and torment as much as possible the poor young man who walked by her side. For she knew perfectly well that she had got upon subjects which could not but give him pain, and somehow just because she did know this she felt tempted to go on with them.

"I suppose you will. Yes, no doubt you will be very gay," he made answer in low, depressed tones. But the melancholy which had so touched her in his voice a while ago made no impression on her now.

"I expect we shall, rather," she said, toying again with her parasol. "Papa talks of taking us up to London for a season, and that is a promise I shall not let him forget, you may be sure. I do so long to see London, you can't think, to say nothing of the parks and balls and operas. And I shouldn't wonder much if we were to go on to Paris."

She had got the whip firmly in her hand, and, as she was by no means tired of using it, there is no saying how many more lashes she might have given her victim if he had not found an opportunity of escape. But fortunately for him they had by this time reached a point where the highway, now just entering the outskirts of the village, branched into two roads, one leading straight into Chorcombe High Street, and consequently Emmy's nearest way home—the other winding round by outlying farms and homesteads which constituted a kind of suburban district. Here John Thwaites, having endured till he could endure no more, came to a pause.

"I think I must say good-bye now. I have some business up this way."

"Oh! have you?" said Emmy, with a negligent elevation of the eyebrows. "Good-afternoon, then, Mr. Thwaites."

"Good-afternoon, Miss Emmy."

At first it seemed that he was going away without so much as shaking hands, nor perhaps would he have been wholly without excuse if he had done so, all her fingers being occupied in the v

doing of a knot into which she had worked the tassel of her parasol. But apparently he could not bring himself to part so coldly, for after a slight hesitation he held out his hand, and, as hers for an instant rested in it, murmured two or three inarticulate words that sounded like "God bless you."

And then he was gone.

Emmy might walk on now without fear of what might be said in case of a meeting with the most malicious gossip of all the neighborhood. She had got rid of that creature John Thwaites, and not only had got rid of him, but had snubbed him and vexed him and put him down in such style as completely to avenge any and all annoyance which she might at any time have suffered by his means. How strange, then, that under these circumstances she no sooner found herself alone than she was ready to burst into tears!

Yes, actually ready to burst into tears, and so probably she would have done, only that she was approaching the region of shops and houses where she felt herself the observed of all observers. It was necessary to be circumspect, and, holding her parasol before her face, she walked on with her head very erect, trying to think of the triumphs in store for her in London and Paris. But she did not succeed in fixing her ideas as she could have wished, and, as she penetrated farther into the village, held her parasol closer and closer to her face, walking very fast to make people think that she was in a hurry.

Whether or not by reason of this precaution, she reached home without being accosted, and, hastily passing by the parlor door, ran up stairs to her own room. She was longing to be alone.

But just as she was about to enter, she heard her mother's voice calling her from the adjoining chamber, and was obliged to answer:

"Well, mamma dear?"

"You can come in, Emmy."

With some reluctance, and a little previous manipulation of her pocket-handkerchief, Emmy obeyed, and presently stood in her mother's bedroom, where Mrs. Waters was engaged in the double task of packing for the journey and arranging her things for removal.

"What did you want to say, dear?" asked Mrs. Waters, who had made the not unnatural mistake of thinking that her daughter had come up stairs to look for her.

"Oh! nothing particular," said Emmy, fiddling with her bonnet-strings. "Miss Egerton will be at the station at ten to-morrow morning—that is all, I think. Well, and what have you been doing, mamma? Ah! you have nearly cleared out the closet."

She stepped forward to view the interior of an empty closet at the farther end of the little room, not because she really took any interest in it, but because she had thus an excuse for standing with her back to her mother.

"Yes, dear. And stowed away every thing in the chest of drawers, ready to be taken into the new house."

"I see," said Emmy, with a languid glance at a little mahogany chest of drawers that stood in a corner hard by—it was a relic from the old Liverpool days, and was one of the few pieces of good furniture in the family possession.

"And how have you been enjoying your walk *this fine day, Emmy?*"

Emmy felt a sudden catching of the breath, and had some difficulty in finding voice to answer.

"Very much, mamma, thank you," she replied after a brief pause, and then added quickly, before her mother had time to go on with the subject: "Oh! what a nice writing-case you have here mamma! Where did you get it?"

She drew a step nearer the chest of drawers as she spoke (she was able to do so without turning her head), and stood contemplating with great apparent interest a leather writing-case which lay in one of the open drawers. She was still standing with her back to her mother, else she might have noticed with some surprise that Mrs. Waters all at once became very much flushed.

"I have had it by me some time," was the answer, given in rather low, faltering accents.

But Emmy was too much engaged in studying how to seem natural herself, to notice any peculiarity in her mother's manner.

"Indeed! I wonder I have never seen it before. And are you going to leave it behind, then? I should have thought it the very thing for travelling with."

"I—I have so few letters to write, you know, dear."

"Ah yes! to be sure. And now, mamma, I think I will go and take off my bonnet."

With these words Emmy somewhat abruptly wheeled round, and by a dexterous evolution managed to get to the door without having occasion to look her mother fairly in the face. In another minute she was in her own room, endeavoring to compose herself after her flurry, and assuredly with no further thought about the leather writing-case.

The subject, however, was not so quickly forgotten by Mrs. Waters. Scarcely had her daughter left the room when, having first softly secured the door, she too advanced to the chest of drawers and stood contemplating the writing-case. Nor did her interest stop here, for presently she drew a bunch of keys from her pocket, and, fitting one into the lock, threw back the leathern lid.

A quantity of unused note-paper and loose manuscript jottings were lying uppermost, but, passing by all these, Mrs. Waters drew out a folded letter, with a faded superscription, evidently written many years ago. She did not unfold it, but merely stood poising it in her hand, and gazing at the yellow characters of the address with eyes which, as she looked, became dimmed with tears.

After a while she raised them and glanced wistfully at the grate, half filled with the charred fragments of old letters and tradesmen's bills which she had that morning been destroying. Then she glanced back again at the letter, and for an instant her fingers closed on it as though about to tear it in two.

But in the next moment her fingers relaxed. She shook her head sadly, and with a sigh slowly replaced the letter where she had found it, among the loose papers in the writing-case, which she locked and in its turn replaced in the drawer where it had first attracted Emmy's attention. And, finally, having carefully covered up the case from view, she shut the drawer, taking particular pains to see that it was properly fastened.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. GRAHAM.

A RED-TILED fishing-village deposited in front of an amphitheatre of green hills that swelled upward on north, east, and west, with just the rudimentary beginnings of a fashionable sea-side resort in the shape of a tiny esplanade and a few groups of white-stuccoed houses at one end—such was the place which is here to be called Nidbourne.

A pleasant place it was, set in the midst of pleasant sights of sea and shore. Here the beach with the long line of ever-shifting waves which seemed to be perpetually attacking, and the steadfast rampart of verdant-crested cliffs which seemed to be perpetually resisting; there sunny breezy stretches of hill-side, where the deep cropped the short grass shorter still, and shady nooks where the dark fern-leaves might hang all day without being stirred by a breath of wind, and waving woods whose flickering green net-work opened every now and then to show a glimpse of the distant horizon line where the blue of the sky melted into the deeper blue of the waters. By the general character of its scenery Nidbourne belonged not so much to Dorset as to Devon, from the borders of which county it was indeed not very remote.

In this quiet, sequestered spot the three ladies from Chorcombe found the bright spring days pass, on the whole, very happily. The repose and seclusion of her life here was just what poor Mrs. Waters most needed after the anxiety and excitement she had lately gone through, and, much as this first separation from her husband pained her, she could not help taking more or less pleasure in the natural beauties around her. As for Emmy, she might perhaps have preferred a place where some little fashionable activity was going forward; yet even Emmy could not but enjoy rambling about on the beach and the hills at Nidbourne. For her nerves had quite recovered now from the temporary disorder by which they had been so strangely attacked on that last afternoon at Chorcombe—quite recovered, at least, if we except one or two occasions on which the song of the nightingale, or the silver sparkle of moonlight on the rising and falling waves, make her feel a little more sentimental than usual. But indeed she had small leisure to be sentimental, even had she been that way inclined; the energy of Olivia, as self-elected governess, keeping her constantly employed—now with her piano, now with sketching out-of-doors or at the open window, so that not a minute of the day was lost. The so-called holiday was in truth a season of pretty close application not only for Emmy, but also for Olivia, who worked quite as hard at teaching as her pupil did at learning. But Olivia enjoyed her visit to Nidbourne none the less on that account, rather all the more, often declaring that she had spent no such happy time since the old days at Miss Lalande's. Thus, so far as she was concerned, Olivia was certainly not sorry that, when the appointed time arrived for returning to Chorcombe, it was reported thence that the Laurels could not be got ready for at least another fortnight or three weeks.

About ten days of this supplementary time had elapsed—passing as pleasantly as those which had preceded them—when one morning as the three

ladies were at breakfast Emmy noticed that Mrs. Waters, who had just received a letter from her husband, did not read any part of it aloud as usual, but silently put it into her pocket, on finishing it, with rather a grave and abstracted look.

"All is well at home, I hope?" asked Emmy, not without some little anxiety.

Mrs. Waters roused herself.

"Oh yes! all quite well, and the building going on nicely." She was silent again for a little, then resumed, somewhat hesitatingly:

"It seems likely that—that we may have a friend coming to see us in the course of a day or two. A Mr. Graham—an old friend who went out to India a great many years ago—he has written to your papa to say he has come to England on business, and—"

"Mr. Graham, mamma! I never heard of him before."

"He went away so many years ago," said Mrs. Waters, in a tone half of apology. "But he is a very old friend."

"And is he coming to see us, did you say, mamma? All the way to Nidbourne on purpose to see us?" asked Emmy, in amazement.

"And—and for the sake of the sea-air, you know, dear. It seems he has done his business, and has a few days to spare before starting; so, as Nidbourne is such a pretty place—"

"How strange that I should never have heard of him before!" exclaimed Emmy, meditating on the subject with increasing wonderment. "A Mr. Graham! What is his Christian name?"

At first it seemed almost as though Mrs. Waters had forgotten it, for she remained some moments without speaking.

"His Christian name is Henry," she answered at length.

"And he has come over from India on business, you say, mamma? What is he, then?"

"An engineer," replied Mrs. Waters, still in a rather low, wavering voice—"partner in a large firm. He is considered very clever, I believe, and has been sent over to inspect models for some important works they are going to begin."

"It is really very strange!" reiterated Emmy. "And is he alone, or does he bring a Mrs. Graham with him?"

"He is not married, my dear."

"If he is not married, I wonder he has not found time to write to you and papa in all these years. I don't remember ever seeing you get a letter from him."

"Perhaps not—I don't know. People who are busy have so little time for writing, that—Another cup, Miss Egerton?"

There were a great many more questions that Emmy would have liked to ask, but she restrained herself, partly because—reminded of Miss Egerton's presence—she did not wish to appear too inquisitive, partly because she thought it best for her purpose to make her inquiries gradually. But though she suffered the subject to drop for the present out of the conversation, she could not help, spoilt child as she was, recurring to it in her own mind with a certain sense of jealous mortification at being so completely taken by surprise. How very odd that she should never have heard of this Mr. Graham before—a person who now turned out to be an intimate friend of her father and mother! Who could he be? and where could

they have got acquainted with him? Really it almost looked as if they must have purposely made a secret of his existence, or how was it that she had never known, at least, that they had a friend in India? And she had never known that they had a friend or acquaintance anywhere out of England—unless indeed it was that horrible Uncle Harold, who long, long ago had fled to some far-away country, America or Australia, or—or India, perhaps. But no, that was quite impossible; her father and mother respected themselves too much to keep up any connection with such a character; and as for introducing him as a personal friend, and under a false name too—the idea was utterly ridiculous, and it was only a pity it had ever come into her head. After all, what was more natural than that they should have a friend who had never happened to hear them speak of? People can not be always talking of their past life; and, for that matter, perhaps his name had been mentioned a dozen times in her presence without her having chanced to notice it. She was quite annoyed with herself for letting such an absurd fancy get hold of her for an instant—a fancy which she felt to be almost an insult to her parents—and was ready to wish that Mr. Graham, whoever he was, had never existed.

There was another besides Emmy ready to wish something of the same sort, and that other was Olivia Egerton. Not that her uncharitable feelings towards Mr. Graham were in the slightest degree due to any such suspicions as those which disturbed Emmy; a comparative stranger to Chorcombe, she knew nothing about the person whom Emmy thought of with horror as her uncle Harold. But Olivia was enjoying herself in this pleasant sea-side retreat with her two friends as she had not enjoyed herself for years, and was naturally annoyed at the idea of having her enjoyment spoilt by the intrusion of a stranger.

"If the man really comes, there will be an end to every bit of pleasure," she thought to herself, petulantly. "Was there ever any thing so tiresome—just when we were getting on so nicely! And I know so exactly what he will be—a creature without an idea in his head beyond money-making, on the one hand, and brainless dissipation that he calls society, on the other—a compound of the city clerk and the heavy swell, like all the Anglo-Indians I ever saw, except the officers, and they are made up of the heavy-swell element pure and simple. Most provoking, to be sure! Well, he isn't here yet, and we must just hope he may change his mind and let us off, after all."

And, thus endeavoring to console herself, Olivia set about her ordinary avocations—that is to say, she spent the day till dinner-time in the open air, walking and talking and sketching and superintending the sketching of her pupil. And after the early dinner she sat down as usual by the piano, to give Emmy her music lesson.

The lesson that day was, up to a certain point, a very prosperous one, partly perhaps because Mrs. Waters had gone out to do some shopping in the village, and both teacher and learner were able to feel entirely unrestrained and at their ease. Be this how it may, certain it is that Emmy played some difficult passages with more *than usual spirit*, and that Olivia was more than

usually warm in her expressions of encouragement.

"Good—very good—a little faster—one, two, three—so, that's it—*decrecendo*—*pianissimo*—don't forget the *rallentando*—very good—now a tempo again—faster, faster—don't be afraid—*allegro vivace*—"

Olivia suddenly broke off, and Emmy's hand as suddenly fell from the keys. A third person was in the room—a visitor who, mumbly announced by a rustic maid-servant, had entered unperceived, and had been obliged to advance to within a few steps of the piano in order to make his presence known.

Olivia and Emmy were too much put out by the unlooked-for appearance of a stranger to be able to ask any questions as to his name or business; and, as he, on his side, seemed at least equally embarrassed, there were a few seconds during which they could only sit contemplating him in unfeigned wonder and curiosity.

He was a tall, powerfully-made man, with dark hair and eyes, and apparently about forty years old, more or less, gentlemanly in demeanor, though somewhat rugged-looking, as one who cares little for appearance, and who has spent much of his time under exposure to sun and wind. For the rest, his features were such as, if they had been a little less bronzed, might have been called handsome but for certain deep lines which care or thought had marked on the forehead, and which imparted something of sternness to the whole face—sternness only partially redeemed by the dark light of deep hazel eyes more than usually clear and expressive.

"I am afraid there must be some mistake," he said, at last, looking round not without a shade of nervousness in his manner. "I came to see Mrs. Waters, but—"

"Oh no! there is no mistake," answered Olivia, graciously, for she had just bethought herself of the Mr. Graham whose expected arrival had been announced that morning. "Mrs. Waters is out just now, but if you don't mind waiting—Miss Waters and I are expecting her back every minute."

"This is Miss Waters?" said the stranger, and turned rather an observant glance on Emmy.

Emmy, to whom the idea of Mr. Graham had also occurred, and who happened to be looking towards him at the time, saw the glance, and as she saw it there occurred to her likewise that other idea which had come into her head in the morning. And though she was quite sure that the idea was preposterously unfounded, she could not help taking a slight prejudice against the visitor on the strength of it, even before she knew whether he was Mr. Graham or not.

"Pray sit down," said Olivia, politely, and, still with a shade of nervousness, the visitor obeyed. The two ladies came away from the piano, and seated themselves likewise, and then followed an embarrassing silence, which Olivia, now fully restored to self-possession, was the first to break.

"Mrs. Waters told us this morning that she was expecting to see an old friend from India in the course of the next day or two—Mr. Graham, I think, she said. I suppose—" And here she looked at the new-comer with an air of courteous inquiry.

"My name is Graham, yes," he made answer. "I—I am afraid I am interrupting the lesson,"

he added, with an uneasy look towards the door, as though he would not have been sorry to get away.

"Pray don't mention it," rejoined Olivia. She waited an instant to give Emmy an opportunity of putting in a word of civil greeting to her mother's friend, but Emmy was sitting shy and silent, with evidently no notion of doing the honors, and Olivia had nothing for it but to resume. "Mrs. Waters will be very glad to see you, I am sure. You have been a great many years absent from England, I believe?"

"Yes, a very great many years."

It was apparent that the conversational initiative was to be thrown entirely upon Olivia. She felt this to be rather unfair, but prepared to do her best under the circumstances.

"And you like India very much, no doubt—people who have been there always do, I think. May I ask what part you have lived in most?"

"I am sometimes obliged to be up the country for months together. But my head-quarters are at Bombay."

"Bombay—then you don't live out of the world, at all events. I suppose Bombay is a very gay place."

"I hardly know—I suppose so—oh yes! of course."

"You speak as if you did not avail yourself much of its advantages in that respect," said Olivia, a little inquisitively.

"! Oh dear no! I don't care for such things at all."

So it appeared that there was nothing in him of the heavy-swell element, at any rate, though indeed his manifest embarrassment in ladies' society had sufficiently proved that already. Did he only consist of the city clerk, then? Olivia could not make him out at all. There was a new interval of silence, during which she was fain to admit to herself that the heavy-swell element has its conveniences for the purposes of conversation. If the man had been a fop, or only half a fop, she would at least have known what to say, but now—she could not talk business to him, and probably he could talk of nothing else. Not that he exactly looked of the city-clerk type either, but then Olivia knew so well what those Anglo-Indians were.

Meanwhile the silence was becoming quite oppressive. Its oppressiveness seemed to be felt at last even by Mr. Graham, for, after sitting some time with his eyes fixed on the ground, he looked up and cast them with a restless motion round the room, as though seeking something that should help him out of his difficulty. After a while they fastened on a chalk landscape drawing that stood propped on a small portable easel at the farther end of the room.

"That is intended for a sketch of the view from this window?" he inquired, evidently with something of an effort, but he was reduced to help himself, now that Olivia would no longer help him.

"That is certainly what it was intended for," said Olivia, with a smile at the wording of the question. "Dear me, Emmy, I am afraid it looks as if the intention had not been carried out very successfully."

"It is a sketch by Miss Waters, then?" he rejoined, with another glance at Emmy.

"Yes," said Olivia, "and we had rather flat-

tered ourselves it was a tolerable specimen of its kind. I do hope you will be able to admire it a little."

"I will see it closer if you will allow me."

He went up to the easel, and stood looking at the sketch for some time, but without making any remark. It occurred to Olivia that perhaps his silence was a judicious mode of concealing entire artistic ignorance.

"And are these other drawings also by Miss Waters?" he asked next, pointing to an open portfolio that lay on a table close at hand.

"Yes, or most of them at least," said Olivia.

"Oh yes! you may look at them, if you like."

He turned over two or three of the drawings which came first to hand, laying them down again with an absence of remark that piqued Emmy not a little, while it confirmed Olivia in her previous suspicion as to the reason of his silence. At length he came to one which he looked at longer and more closely than any of the others, while his face lighted up with an expression of something like interest.

"There is something more than intention here," he said, after a minute or two spent in examination. "The view from the window again, I see, but very differently treated. This is not yours, surely?" he added, with a doubtful look at Emmy.

"Oh no! that is not mine," answered Emmy, with a decided pout on her rosy lips, for she felt quite insulted by the low opinion of her abilities which the tone and manner of the question implied. "That is Miss Egerton's, of course?"

"Yours?" said the visitor, glancing from the drawing to Olivia, and then back to the drawing again.

"I am glad you like it," said Olivia, modestly, but not without some internal self-complacency, for after such a proof of discrimination she could not help feeling a sudden respect for Mr. Graham's critical powers. "I should be rather pleased with it myself, if it were not for something about those hills in the background—I have always felt there was a mistake somewhere, and yet I can't tell exactly what it is."

He directed a quick, scrutinizing look at the natural landscape without, and then once more brought back his attention to the sketch.

"You have not allowed quite enough for the space between that farthest peak and the ridge in front," he pronounced presently, "and the slope here is not exactly what it ought to be. If this line were brought a little lower, and this other so"—and here he passed the blunt end of a pencil lightly across the paper—"I believe you would need nothing more to put it right."

"I think I understand," said Olivia, who indeed fancied that she saw the way to making a very great improvement in the correctness of her work. "Let me see; this line so, and this other so—is that what you mean?"

"Not quite at such an acute angle, that would be going too far the other way. I am afraid I shall injure your drawing if I touch it, but if you could give me a piece of note-paper—Oh! thank you, this will do nicely."

He took a sheet of paper which Olivia handed to him, wrapped it to steady it round a small book which he drew from his pocket, and went to the window, where he stood copying down the outline of the distant hills, while Olivia and Emmy

awaited the result in respectful silence. Olivia could not help feeling a good deal surprised. It really did seem as if the man was capable of taking an interest in something besides his business.

"That is what I mean, or something like what I mean, at least," he said, after a few minutes, and handed to Olivia the paper, still wrapped round the book which had been his improvised easel.

"Why that is the very effect I had been trying for without being able to get it," exclaimed Olivia, in undisguised admiration. "What a wonderfully correct eye you must have!"

"A little knowledge of drawing is so necessary in my business that I am obliged to cultivate it as much as I can."

"Ah yes! to be sure, your business," said Olivia; then, conscious of having spoken with a touch of superciliousness quite uncalled for under the circumstances, she hastened to add: "You must have always had a strong taste for drawing, at any rate."

"I don't know about always," he answered, with a half-smile. "But since I have been obliged to make it a study I have certainly learned to get very fond of it."

On hearing him thus speak of the facility he undoubtedly possessed as of a comparatively recent acquisition, Olivia was again a little surprised. Had he ever had any stronger tastes, then, before being obliged to cultivate this one?

"I will set about altering my drawing at once," she said aloud. "I may keep this paper by me as a guide, I suppose? But stop, this is your book, I think."

She handed him the little volume round which the paper had been wrapped. In doing so her eye caught the lettering on the back, and with greater surprise than ever she saw that it was a pocket edition of some Greek classic. She had never imagined to herself a man of business who should be a classical student as well, and felt for once thrown quite out of her reckoning.

She was just thinking what she could appropriately say by way of carrying on the conversation—and somehow her standard of appropriateness was by this time much higher than it had been at first—when the door opened, and she was relieved of her difficulty by the entrance of Mrs. Waters.

On discovering the unexpected presence of a stranger Mrs. Waters was visibly startled—so much startled, indeed, that she turned unwontedly pale, and for a moment stood, as it were, transfixed just within the threshold. Mr. Graham on his part seemed a good deal confused also (how entirely unused to society he evidently was!), and an awkward pause ensued without greetings being exchanged on either side. At last, though with perceptible nervousness, he made a step forward, and, extending his hand, said, a little more tremulously than he had yet spoken:

"Mrs. Waters, I am glad to see you again."

"How do you do, Mr. Graham?" she said, faintly. But it was manifest that she had not yet recovered from her surprise.

They shook hands, and then, after another awkward little pause, she regained sufficient self-possession to murmur something about taking a chair, and both sat down. Emmy seated herself too, close to her mother, while Olivia, seeing that

she was released from all further duties of hostess-ship, and judging indeed that it would be in better taste to leave her friends and their visitor to themselves, retreated to the farther end of the room and busied herself in the correction of her drawing.

It has been said that Emmy seated herself close to Mrs. Waters—perhaps not altogether uninfluenced by the consideration that thus she could see and hear all that passed between her mother and the mysterious stranger. For Emmy was naturally of an inquisitive turn, and her curiosity on the present occasion had been worked up to its highest pitch. She had not failed to notice her mother's agitation, and though she was aware that Mrs. Waters, living for years a quiet, out-of-the-world life, was apt to be flurried by the presence of visitors, she could not help reverting to the suspicions of the morning, and wondering more seriously than she had wondered yet, whether there could really be any thing in them. So it need not be said that she watched and listened with all her eyes and ears, and Emmy's eyes were very bright and her ears very sharp.

It was some little time before any thing further was said on either side; but presently Mrs. Waters, with a momentary look at Emmy, began, timidly:

"I heard from Austin—from my husband—this morning that we were likely soon to see you—to have the pleasure of seeing you. You are thinking of staying some time at Nidbourne, I believe?"

"About a fortnight, I think. I must leave in time to catch the next mail from Southampton."

"You are going to leave England again so soon?" and Emmy fancied that she detected a slight intonation of regret in her mother's voice. But then it might have been partly for the sake of politeness.

"I must," answered the visitor. He looked at Emmy and hesitated, then went on: "I hope Mr. Waters was quite well when you heard?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Mrs. Waters. Emmy listened to hear if she asked after any friends of Mr. Graham's in return, but she did not, only adding: "I think you will find you have made a good choice in coming to Nidbourne. It is a very nice place."

"So it seems. You have been here some time, I think?"

"Yes, more than a month. It has been an exceedingly pleasant change."

"I suppose it has. You live in a very pretty situation."

"Oh! very much so, indeed."

How stiff and ceremonious they were, to be sure! It seemed impossible that this could be the conversation of two persons who had ever stood in any near relation to each other—the relation of brother and sister, for instance. Oh! surely it was quite impossible. And yet—Emmy was very acute, but she was also very inexperienced, and felt fairly nonplussed.

The dialogue went on in this style for some time longer, very heavily and draggingly, and with long pauses, as though even the formal platitudes which were all that the speakers found to say cost them some trouble to bring forth. Emmy was almost sure that those suspicions of hers were all nonsense. At length Mr. Graham, as though in despair of being able to carry on the conversation

on further, looked at his watch, and rose to take leave. Mrs. Waters did not say a word to induce him to remain, and rose too, with a promptitude which to Emmy, a country girl accustomed to see a great deal of pressing, seemed strangely cold and inhospitable. Perhaps the same idea occurred to Mrs. Waters herself, for as he made his adieux she said, rather timidly and undecidedly :

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you often during your stay. You could come and line with us to-morrow, perhaps—two o'clock is our hour."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad."

Thus the invitation was given and accepted, and even Emmy thought that her mother could hardly have done less than make some arrangement of the sort.

It was Emmy's turn to shake hands with the visitor next, which she did rather coldly, for it is always difficult to forgive a person who has once been the object of a prejudice, even though a mistaken one. This done, he made a step towards the door, than halted, and turned hesitatingly in the direction of Olivia. Olivia had just raised her eyes from her drawing, so that each saw the other looking. He wavered still for an instant, then, deciding hastily, went forward to take leave of her also.

"Good-morning," he said, and, after another moment of uncertainty, he shook hands with her as he had done with Mrs. Waters and Emmy. "I ought to apologize for taking up so much of your and your pupil's time."

"Oh! not at all," said Olivia. "I ought rather to thank you for so kindly putting my sketch right. It is an immense improvement."

"You have done it already!" and he glanced down at the drawing with evident surprise at her rapidity, not unmixed with gratification. "Yes, that is it exactly—I am very glad to have been of a little use to you, though you would have found it out for yourself, of course. But now I must not disturb you longer."

He bowed and Olivia bowed, and in another minute he was out of the room. Mrs. Waters followed him to the landing just to see if the servant was in attendance, but she was back again almost directly, and the three ladies were left together to criticise the departed visitor as they would.

The only person, however, who seemed inclined to say much in the way of criticism was Emmy.

"What a queer person!" she commented, as soon as he was out of hearing.

"Do you think so, my dear?" said her mother, with rather a feeble smile.

Olivia made no remark.

"A very queer person, indeed," rejoined Emmy, emphatically. "One would think, to see him, he had been a hermit all his life—so awkward and blunt—and quite rude too sometimes, I declare" (here Emmy was thinking of his implied disparagement of her sketches). "Well, he may be very nice and all that, but I can't say I more than half like him myself. And oh! did you notice the absurd mistake he made—actually talking to Miss Egerton about her pupil! I believe the stupid creature takes her for my governess."

"How awful!" said Olivia, with a silvery laugh. "Quite a frightful calamity, really."

She became silent for a few seconds, reflecting with an air of unusual gravity. Presently she spoke again, this time with what appeared to be a touch of embarrassment, while a very becoming flush rose to her cheeks. "Seriously though, as he seems to have got the notion into his head—and it is a natural notion enough under the circumstances—I should be very glad if—if you could manage not to deceive him. It is so pleasant to leave one's pomps and vanities behind for a little."

"Oh! Miss Egerton!" remonstrated Emmy. "Do you mean to say you really wish people to think—"

"I really do, child," answered Olivia, with a slight deepening of the flush. "I hate to be ticketed as a great personage; you ought to know that by this time. So, as a favor, I beg that you will let people take me for whatever they may think I look like; and this Mr. Graham among the rest."

"Oh! of course if it is to please you, Miss Egerton—"

"It is to please me," persisted Olivia. "And you, Mrs. Waters, you will oblige me, I am sure? It is such a delightful reminder of old days to be taken for a governess; I would not have the illusion destroyed for the world."

Mrs. Waters did not exactly see the importance of the point one way or the other. But of course she could not refuse a wish urged by her friend with so much earnestness, and Olivia obtained the required promise.

"I am so much obliged to you," she declared. "Those royal robes are horribly stifling, and it is such a comfort to get them off! No wonder Haroun Alraschid enjoyed those incognito walks of his."

"But he didn't take them for enjoyment," put in Emmy; "he wanted to find out what people thought of him."

"Ah! to be sure, so he did," said Olivia.

CHAPTER X.

A SOUTH-WESTER.

THE weather had been very fine at Nidbourne for the last month, but on the morning following that of Mr. Graham's arrival came a change. A breeze sprang up during the night, which gradually increased to a gale, and by the time Olivia and her friends were stirring it was evident that the day was to be a boisterous one. The sky was sunless and lowering, with dark gray masses of cloud sweeping over its face from the south-west; the wind rushed against the walls of the house in wild, prolonged gusts, like a living thing attacking them; while outside the trees, and even the very blades of grass, might be seen bending and quivering with every fresh onslaught. Meantime at a little distance (for the house was situated some way back from the beach) there was heard, above the loudest whistling of the blast, the dull, steady roar of an angry sea.

However, the ladies were not to be thus deterred from their accustomed exercise. Olivia and Emmy, indeed, staid in doors for half an hour or so after breakfast, but only in order to make sure of a music lesson, of which the expects

company of Mr. Graham might balk them in the afternoon. As soon as this was over they went out to join Mrs. Waters, who, having some marketing to do, had not waited for them, but had arranged to meet them on the parade.

Turning their faces resolutely towards the wind, the two friends battled their way down to the front of the village, and at length emerged on an open space looking on the sea. The sight they saw there was certainly worth seeing. Near the shore the great powerful waves, lashed into fury by the bluster overhead, curled their huge necks, and hurled themselves with blind, bull-like energy on the beach, threw up a white shower of foam as though in anger at their own impotence, and then, with a mighty noise of seething seas and rattling boulders, rushed back to prepare for another attack. Away from the shore, under a grim scowling sky, tumbled and tossed in infinite desolation a boundless waste of gray deserted waters—gray save for the breakers that streaked them here and there with ominous white, and deserted save for one or two diminishing specks on the leaden line of the horizon. Far and near, every thing that met the eye was suggestive of the reserve forces of nature.

Olivia and Emmy stood contemplating the prospect for some time, and then, bethinking themselves that Mrs. Waters would probably be waiting, hastened along to the strip of terraced walk dignified with the name of parade. This said parade was not more than a hundred yards in length, and as just now there were hardly half a dozen people on it (this was the dead season at Nidbourne), a glance was enough to show whether the person sought for was among them.

"That is mamma—I know her by her shawl. And so she has actually met that Mr. Graham!"

As Emmy spoke, she jerked her head rather viciously in the direction of a lady and gentleman who, apparently earnestly engaged in conversation, were walking a little way in front. For a moment she felt awfully suspicious; so suspicious that she was ashamed of herself directly afterwards. It was natural enough, when she came to think of it, that her mother should have met Mr. Graham on the parade; the parade was just the place for accidental meetings. And of course when one met an old friend it was necessary to speak.

On discovering the pair in front, Olivia and Emmy quickened their pace in order to come up with them. But Mrs. Waters and her companion still walked on, evidently too much engrossed in what they were saying to vouchsafe a look round. As Emmy noticed this, she remembered the few stilted sentences in which their conversation had been carried on in her presence, and again that horrid idea of yesterday morning came rushing into her mind. She was conscious of a feeling of positive dislike to Mr. Graham.

The earnestness with which the two seemed to be conversing must really have been rather marked, for it struck not Emmy only, but Olivia. As has already been said, Olivia was not sufficiently acquainted with the details of the family history to suspect what Emmy suspected; but she certainly observed that the discourse of the couple before her, whatever it was, appeared to be very interesting. It even passed through her head to wonder whether peradventure Mr. Graham could be one for whom in past days Mrs. Waters might

have entertained a feeling deeper than mere friendship, and for whom, for the sake of those past days, she still could not help keeping up a trace of sentimental regard. But then Olivia remembered that, according to all appearance, Mrs. Waters must be several years older than the stranger, and she rejected the notion as altogether wild and untenable. Nor was it entirely without a sensation of relief on her friend's account that she found herself able thus to regard it.

"Mamma!" cried Emmy at last, impatiently.

She and Olivia were by this time almost close to those in front; so close that Mrs. Waters heard in spite of the high wind, and with a start stopped and turned her head.

"Why, Emmy!" she said, smiling, though perhaps rather artificially. "I have just met Mr. Graham, you see."

"We have been following you ever so long, mamma," said Emmy, with somewhat of an aggrieved air; "I thought you were never going to look round. Ah! how do you do?" she added coldly, as Mr. Graham stepped forward to greet her.

Olivia was standing a pace or two behind, and thought that perhaps Mr. Graham might altogether forget to notice her. But no sooner had he exchanged salutations with Emmy than he made another step forward in the direction of Emmy's companion, and, though again with a little apparent embarrassment and constraint, shook hands with her as he had done yesterday. Perhaps, owing to the infectiousness of example (for she was not naturally shy), Olivia felt slightly embarrassed and constrained also, and the ceremony was gone through in rather an awkward silence. The silence might have continued some time longer, for neither Mrs. Waters nor Emmy seemed inclined to break it, had not the wind come to the relief of all four by blowing a corner of Olivia's shawl over her head in such unceremonious fashion that she could not but laugh in disengaging herself.

"What a stormy morning!" she exclaimed, as with reddening cheeks she drew round her arm the refractory corner, which Mr. Graham had helped to capture. "I am afraid this will give you a very unfavorable idea of Nidbourne weather."

"No, I think I have been rather enjoying it than otherwise. I have been watching the sea all morning."

"We have been watching it too—Miss Waters and I. Thank you, I am quite comfortable now. It seems a very selfish thing to say, but I do like a rough sea—to look at, at least. But what a sudden change since yesterday!"

"It seems sudden, yes. Still, I rather expected it, from the look of the sea in the evening."

"Dear me, and I was saying it seemed so settled, was I not, Emmy? But then I never was the least bit weather-wise, and never shall be, I am afraid."

"I have seen a good deal of the sea at different times of my life," explained Mr. Graham.

As Emmy heard, she could not help remembering that before marriage her mother's home (and consequently the home of her mother's brother likewise) had been in a North of England sea-port. But of course she said nothing, and, lest she should be so much as suspected of suspicion, turned with an air of indifference to look

he long line of white breakers which fringed the east. But she had hardly looked when she exclaimed:

"What can all those people be doing down here? Just look! there seems to be quite a rowd. Has any thing happened, I wonder?"

She pointed to a part of the beach about a quarter of a mile off, where, in front of the oldest and most unfashionable end of the village, a group of some thirty or forty people was collected—a very unusual phenomenon in that quiet part of the world.

Mr. Graham cast a quick glance out to sea.

"There is a boat trying to come in," he said.

The ladies looked, and saw, a short way from the shore, just opposite the point at which the throng was assembled, a small black object, of which they could scarcely tell at first whether it was a buoy or a little fishing-boat, tossing up and down among the waves, sometimes borne high on the crest of a great ridge of water, sometimes lost to sight altogether.

"Good heavens!" cried Olivia, "what will become of them? Oh! but let us go and see—let us go at once."

She seized Emmy's arm, and all the party hastened forward in the direction of the rapidly increasing crowd, watching meanwhile as narrowly as they could the movements of the boat. As they drew nearer they saw that it was still tossing about as tumultuously as ever, and making scarcely any way. The tide, which had been coming in all morning, had just turned, and notwithstanding that the wind was south-west, and consequently blowing towards the land, the backward current of the water was so strong that it was scarcely possible for so small a boat on a rough sea to make head against it. Nor was this the worst of the danger.

"I don't see how she is to get in with only one man to work her," said Mr. Graham, after looking fixedly for a minute or two.

"Only one man!" echoed Olivia, in dismay.

"Poor unfortunate creature! what can have tempted—"

"He has gone out to bring in his nets, I fancy. You see those stakes yonder;" here he pointed to sundry posts the tops of which every now and then became visible above the waves in the neighborhood of the boat. "That is where they spread their nets. I suppose this man wanted to save his, and could find nobody to help him."

Olivia looked towards the boat in compassionate terror. Yes, it was too true; on advancing nearer she could see for herself that it had only one occupant—a big stalwart-looking man, whose features, as he was ever and anon upborne by a wave, she could discern plainly, as also his straining efforts to approach the shore. But frantic as those efforts evidently were, they were all too feeble to force a passage through the rolling masses of water which, as fast as the boat had laboriously made a few feet of way, hurled it back and left it helplessly rocking in a valley of white foam.

By this time the party found themselves on the outskirts of the crowd—a crowd made up almost entirely of the inhabitants of the fishermen's cottages which mainly composed that end of the village.

"Oh! what do you think? will he be lost?"

cried Olivia, fastening eagerly on a gray-haired old fisherman whom she thought likely to be more experienced than the rest.

"Can't zay how it mid be, miss. But it do look like it."

"What! with so many standing by! Oh! can nothing be done to help him?"

"I don't know what," said the man, looking stolidly out at the dreary prospect of angry waves and frowning sky. "You can zee vor yourself. Well, whatever comes to en, 'twere noo volk's doens but his own. I twold en he were a vool, and zoo he were. When he couldden geet two men or dree men to goo, a chile mid ha' known woon man wouldden be much good a bringen hwome nets a day like this. But he were like a madman about theasem nets o' his, though he'd be pleased enough now to come back 'thout' em if zoo be he could come back at all. Well, it idden my vault; I twold en avore he went."

"And zoo I twold en too," put in another bystander, "and zaid I wouldden goo wi' en not voa virty poun'. But he were always woon vor his own way, or his nets 'ud ha' been zafe at hwome like his neighbors. I twold en yees-terday it were a-gwayen to come on a blwow."

"He don't understan' the ways of our zea noo mwore than of us," said the old man to whom Olivia had spoken. "Let en goo back to where he come vrom, and where maybe the zea is better vriends wi' en. It idden because he's took a Dorset wife that he's got a right to take the bread out of other volks' mouth that he don't belong to. Teeh! did you zee that? If he geets knocked among theasem pwosts it will be bad vor en."

A heavy wave had struck the boat, and sent it reeling along towards the place where the stakes already spoken of showed their half-submerged heads above water. The unfortunate rower seemed to be losing strength, for the wave had subsided, but the boat drifted nearer and nearer to the danger.

"Ahoy! my boy, sheer off, sheer off!" bel-
lows the old fisherman, warmed up into sudden excitement by the imminence of the peril, and vociferating with superhuman energy through a natural speaking-trumpet formed of his hands.

But he might as well have spoken to the wind, which bore away his words as they left his lips, and dissipated them uselessly into space.

The boat struck heavily against one of the posts and swung round. At the same instant another wave was seen rolling forward with gigantic arched neck to the assault, and all on shore held their breath.

A great roar and dash, and every thing was lost to sight behind a cloud of spray. The wave had met the obstacle and broken over it.

The spray dispersed, and again the boat was visible, still in the same place as before. There was a sound from the spectators—not a cheer, however, but a half-shuddering groan. The boat, entangled among the posts so that it could not drift farther, lay floating keel uppermost.

In another moment a head appeared above the water a yard or two beyond the boat, and again ~~the~~ ^{the} man on shore held their breath. The waves came and went, and still the head was seen on the surface, but still no nearer than at first. It was evident that the backward suction

of the tide made it as difficult for the swimmer to come within reach of the support offered by the upturned hull as it had previously been for the rower to bring his craft to land. At last a mighty wave rose, and, dashing over the head of the still struggling man, hurled him violently forward. When the subsiding spray again allowed him to become visible, he was discovered clinging to the capsized boat, and there ran through the group of spectators a murmur of satisfaction.

"Yees, but what's the good o't iv we can't geet at en?" Olivia heard the old man beside her say between his teeth.

Apparently the same question suggested itself to others, for the murmur of satisfaction died away, and a dead, despondent silence followed.

A few seconds passed thus, and then the lookers-on saw a hand held up above the waves, gestulating wildly towards the shore.

"Oh! save him! save him!" exclaimed Olivia, turning with passionate entreaty towards the old fisherman. "Will you let him drown in your sight, and not so much as try?"

"We'd be very glad to zave en, miss, if zoo be we could. But as vor tryen 't'ud be nought but putten ourzelves in the same case."

"What! and will nobody help him, then?" Olivia looked across the sea to the spot where the hand was still held up in mute supplication, and felt her very heart turn cold with horror.

"Who will put out with me?" cried a voice behind her.

With a sudden bound of all her pulses, Olivia turned round and saw the speaker. It was Mr. Graham, who, having made choice of a roomy, strong-looking boat, one of three or four that stood drawn up on the beach, was already stooping to undo the fastenings.

For a while there was no answer, but presently the old fisherman made himself spokesman for the rest.

"It can't be done, maister. Our lives be as dear to us as thik chap's to him. Look at the sea, and we know zom'at of the sea, mind you."

"Aye, aye, we know," said another, and a general hum of assent went round the crowd.

Mr. Graham looked steadily towards the grim expanse of waters.

"I know something of the sea too," he replied, "and I believe it can be done. Twenty pounds apiece to the three brave fellows who will go with me—come."

Another silence followed—rather a longer one this time—and then the old fisherman, with a dogged shake of the head, spoke again:

"Twoont do, maister, twoont do. You have got the money p'raps, and p'raps you haven't; but money is money, and life is life."

"And that man's life!" cried Olivia, looking despairingly at the uplifted hand still stretched out to implore aid. "Oh! can nothing save him, can no money—"

"Money woot make the sea goo down when he's up, miss."

Olivia could say no more, could only watch the beseeching gestures of that hand in silent anguish. There was a pause, and then a voice behind her, the same voice that had spoken before, asked:

"Will none of you come with me—not one? Then must I go alone?"

There was no answer, and Olivia understood that the invitation was rejected. She looked round—with a face strangely colorless, but with eyes that glowed with a concentrated fire of resolution.

"I will go with you, if you will let me. I can row, and shall surely be better than nobody."

"You!" ejaculated Mr. Graham, and looked at her as though scarcely sure that he had heard aright.

"Yes, I," said Olivia quietly, and she spoke with so assured a manner that not one of all the by-standers who turned their astonished eyes towards her could doubt that she meant it.

Among those who looked with the most attention was the old fisherman. She was about to speak again, when, laying his hand somewhat unceremoniously on her shoulder, he pushed past her towards Mr. Graham, saying:

"Dang it, if the maids ben't afeard o' the sea, 'twoont do vor the men to be. Here, maister, I'll goo wi' you, vor woon."

"And I vor another, maister."

"And I."

The crew was made up, but still from a dozen to twenty more volunteers offered, who, finding themselves not required to man the boat, devoted their energies to dragging it down to the water's edge, bringing oars and grappling-irons; and otherwise expediting the launch. With so many to help, all the preparations were soon made, and in scarcely more time than it takes to write the words the little craft was fully equipped, and with her living freight lay just within the white fringe of froth left by the last wave, ready to try what chances might await her on the stormy sea which chafed and fumed beyond.

Ah! how that sea chafed and fumed, surely! As Olivia saw the great breakers rise up and rol towards the shore with a roar as of wild beast advancing on their prey, she was half impelled to rush forward to the boat and implore its crew not to put forth. But then her eye caught sight of that other boat on which the breakers had already wreaked their fury, and of the hand which still beckoned entreatingly beside it; and she felt that at any risk the attempt at rescue must be made. Still, at the same time, she felt that the pain of seeing it made was almost more than she could bear, and with an instinctive seeking for sympathy and companionship she looked round for Mrs. Waters and Emmy, whose very existence she had forgotten. They were standing at a little distance, both greatly agitated, especially Mrs. Waters, who seemed almost to cling to her daughter for support. Half involuntarily Olivia drew a few steps nearer to them.

Again she turned towards the sea. The boat was in the act of pushing off, following in the wake of a retreating wave with an impetuous rush that threatened to drag it under another wave which was coming in, and which for a moment seemed to stand over it like a wall. Olivia expected nothing else but that boat and crew would be engulfed together, and averted her eyes. Presently she heard a great shout from the spectators which did not sound like a shout of horror, and she ventured once more to glance upward. The tiny bark, well away from the shore, was riding triumphantly on the top of the waves.

A few minutes of suspense succeeded—mis

rites every one of which looked like an age. Again and again the boat was hidden from view by some great bank of water that rose up between it and the shore, but again and again it reappeared in safety, each time nearer the spot where the drowning man still clung to the capsized craft, still held in its place by the wooden stakes among which it had drifted. At last the spot was all but reached.

Once more Olivia withdrew her gaze. The boat, as it ceased to cut through the water, rocked so violently to and fro among the breakers that she absolutely dared not watch it further. What if it should share the fate of that other!

One second passed, and another and another, and in the intensity of her straining expectation Olivia's heart seemed to have stopped its pulsations. Suddenly she heard a new shout from those on the beach, and on raising her eyes, the first sight that met them was a wild waving of hats and caps in front of her. She looked towards the boat, and saw that it had left the overturned keel behind (with no man clinging to it now), and was making for the shore. The rescuers had done their work, and were coming home with the rescued.

But a heavy and perilous task yet remained for them. The wind-beaten waves still swelled and tossed furiously on every side, and the same backward draught of water which had rendered it impossible for one rower to approach the shore made it a work of danger and difficulty even for a crew of four. But in spite of danger and difficulty—in spite of towering waves which flung them forward with a violence that threatened to swamp them, and then dragged them back a longer way than a minute's patient rowing sufficed to make up—in spite of all obstacles, it was apparent that the distance between the boat and the land was diminishing.

Meanwhile Olivia stood and watched with an anxiety which increased rather than lessened as its end seemed to approach. A few minutes or seconds would now decide the whole issue, and the fewer those minutes or seconds became the more critical did they appear. The boat seemed to be coming in at a little distance from the point where it had gone out, and the crowd had moved off some way to meet it, but Olivia still stood rooted to the spot where she had stood at first. Perhaps if Mrs. Waters and Emmy had gone forward she might have mechanically followed them, but they too remained behind spell-bound and motionless.

The decisive moment had arrived. A few feet only intervened between the rowers and safety, but behind rose a huge wave which, if it reached the shore before they did, might even yet drag them back and engulf them. A film floated before Olivia's eyes, and for a while she could see nothing.

All at once the sound of voices burst upon her ear—a wild confused sound at first, shaping itself as it went on into a cheer the longest and loudest she had ever heard, a cheer which the very sea and sky seemed to echo back.

The boat was being hauled up on the beach.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER THE STORM.

It was as though a load of lead had suddenly lifted itself from Olivia's heart.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, fervently, and drew a breath of infinite relief.

"Thank Heaven!" echoed a stifled voice at her side.

She looked round, and saw Mrs. Waters, who, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, stood leaning on Emmy's arm, trembling violently.

"Oh! mamma, dear mamma, don't!" entreated Emmy, who was herself, however, a good deal agitated. "It is all over now, you know."

But Emmy's attempt at consolation only made her mother break down outright.

"It is very foolish of me, dear. But—but it is so dreadful to see any one—to see people in such danger."

Olivia was silent; she felt somehow afraid of being overcome too, and for some time none of the three spoke. At last Emmy, seeing her mother grow more composed, cast a longing glance towards the throng of people collected round the returned boat.

"May we not go and look too, mamma?"

Olivia was quite grateful to Emmy for the suggestion. She had been two or three times on the point of making it herself, but had been restrained by an unaccountable feeling of shyness.

They moved in the direction of the crowd. But just as they had reached its outskirts there was a sudden parting in the mass, and a falling back of people on one side and another as though to make way. The ladies of course fell back too.

In the passage thus opened up there presently appeared something that was being carried along, shoulder-high, by three or four bearers. Olivia saw at a second glance that this something was a stretcher, improvised out of a couple of planks roped together, with a man lying on it.

She felt her limbs ready to give way under her. Who could it be? Was it possible that—But no; in another moment she saw Mr. Graham emerge from the crowd, walking by the side of the men who were carrying the stretcher. She was wonderfully relieved. It would have been so dreadful if he—the person who had been foremost in the act of mercy—had suffered serious injury by his generous heroism.

The little group with the stretcher was moving off the beach towards the village, and the crowd was beginning to disperse.

"What is the matter? who is hurt?" hastily inquired Olivia of the person next her, a large-boned shock-headed youth of very raw and rustic appearance.

"'Tis Evan Griffiths," answered the lad, with a loutish stare.

"Evan Griffiths?"

"Yees. He's a-got an outlandish name like, 'cause he comes vrom an outlandish place."

"Is that the man they went out to save?" asked Olivia, bethinking herself of some expressions let fall by the old fisherman.

"The chap as were in the water? Yees."

"And is he much hurt? Oh, what is the matter?"

"He's a-got his lag broke, drough the zide o'

the bwoat a hettin en like. They be a carryen of en to the infirmiry."

"His leg broken! poor man, how dreadful! And he is going to the infirmiry—oh! I hope they will treat him well and take care of him."

"Oh! they'll take care of en, noo veer vor that. I heerd the gen'l'man zay myzself as how he 'ud goo wi' en an' speak to the doctors vor en."

"The gentleman! The gentleman that went out in the boat?"

"Yees, that's the woon."

Olivia looked after the little procession as it filed round a corner into the rustic High Street, and for a while kept silence, not trusting herself to speak. For she was thinking how brave and generous and considerate some people in this world were, and of how much more value to their fellow-creatures than a poor useless being like herself, who was only fit to stand by, meaning well but doing nothing. Ah! if she could only be of some use too, she who was so much envied for having more money than she knew what to do with— Suddenly she bethought herself of a way in which money might be made to do something towards helping the good work.

"And this poor man—this Evan Griffiths," she asked, turning once more to the boy—"he has others depending on him, I suppose. Is he married?"

"Oh yees! he's a-married."

"And has he any children?"

"I think there be dree o' em, if ye count the babby."

"Where do they live?" demanded Olivia, eagerly. "Here in the village?"

"No, no. They ized to, but they couldden pay the rent. Do live now zom'eres up Brookston way."

Brookston was a hamlet between two and three miles inland.

"Up Brookston way? Can't you tell me more exactly than that?"

"Where be Griffith's new house, Jimmy?" asked the lad of a companion who stood near.

"Where be Griffiths's new house?" echoed the second youth, coming shuffling up at the question. "Why, in Brookston, to be sure. I went by 'en yeesterday, an' zeed Mrs. Griffiths wi' my own eyes a-standen at the door like. Oh! I zay, woon't she be in a taken when she hears?"

"Woon't she? Ay, I nar thought o' that," said the first boy, scratching his head, and staring at his friend as though at the propounder of some great discovery.

"Tis my consait zome woon ought to goo vor to let her know," rejoined the other. "She will be in a perty taken, for sartain."

"I'll tell ye what, Jim, I'll goo."

"An' I'll goo wi' ye," said Jim. "Come along, and let's zee who'll be rust."

"Stop," interposed Olivia. She felt that the self-appointed messengers, though probably good-hearted lads enough as lads go, were undertaking their task with a gusto which precluded all hope of delicacy or tenderness in the manner of its performance. "You are very good boys, but I am afraid— You shall show me the way to this poor woman's, and I will go and break the news to her myself."

"You be a-gwayen yourzelf to tell her?" said one of the boys, in astonishment.

"Certainly I am," answered Olivia, firmly. "So I will say good-bye for an hour or two," she added, turning round to her two friends, who were standing a little way behind, where they could hear all that passed. "I will be as quick as I possibly can."

"Oh! Miss Egerton," cried Emmy, "surely you don't mean— All the way to Brookston— why, it will tire you to death. And it is coming on to be a wet afternoon, I'm sure."

"Yees, that's sartain," said Jim, holding out the back of his sunburnt hand. "The drops is a-vallen already."

"You will get wet through," declared Emmy.

"I am afraid you will, indeed," said her mother.

"I dare say I shall, but I shan't mind that—it will do me good." And really Olivia felt as though the prospect of getting wet heightened her ardor in the undertaking; a little discomfort in the execution of her task would increase its value as a contribution to the good cause. "There, I must be gone now, or I shan't be in time to be of any use, after all. Take your mamma home at once, Emmy dear; she is looking quite pale and miserable. Now, then, the nearest way, please."

Olivia moved off under the escort of her two guides. But she had not gone more than a few steps when she returned.

"Oh! Mrs. Waters, I forgot to say that—that you need not wait dinner for me, of course."

"But indeed we shall; we could not think of anything else."

"Well, yes, just as you like—I shall be back very soon. And—and by-the-way, you will remember to keep my little secret for me, eh?"

"Your secret, Miss Egerton?"

"Yes, about the governess, I mean—I don't want any body to find out. You will both remember, won't you?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, Olivia rushed back to rejoin her guides, and Mrs. Waters and Emmy took their way towards their lodgings. As Olivia had observed, Mrs. Waters looked very much in need of rest.

"How wonderfully brave that Mr. Graham is!" said Emmy, after they had walked a little while in silence.

She had been pondering over the scene of the morning, and the remark had escaped her as a half-involuntary expression of genuine admiration.

"Ah! is he not?" returned Mrs. Waters, earnestly.

There was something about the words and the manner in which they were uttered which, rightly or wrongly, suggested to Emmy a feeling of personal gratification on the part of the speaker. In spite of the respect with which Mr. Graham's conduct had inspired her, she grew jealous again immediately.

"It does seem so strange that I should never have heard the name of Graham before," she said, presently—"never in connection with a friend of yours, that is, for of course the name itself—" Here she paused with something of a startled air; she had just thought of a coincidence which at first sight did certainly seem rather curious. "By-the-way, grandmamma Maxwell was a Graham before she was married, was she not?"

Perhaps because she was herself struck by the

coincidence, Mrs. Waters did not answer for a few seconds.

"Yes, dear," she replied at last, in rather an undertone. "But—but the name is very common up in our part of the country."

"Then this Mr. Graham is no relation of yours?" was a question that trembled on Emmy's lips. But when she tried to give it utterance she found that she had not the courage. It has elsewhere been said that there was a forbidden subject on which she had all her life been accustomed to curb her curiosity, and the force of this habit was still potent with her. And then, apart from all other objections, how could she speak words which would imply (for of course they could be taken in no other sense) that she suspected her mother of introducing a thief and a forger into the family circle under a false name and under false pretenses? However delicately she might put it, such a suggestion could not be other than an insult—an insult to her mother, who was the soul of uprightness and honorable feeling, an insult to the brave man who had that very day performed under her eyes an act of self-devoted heroism such as she had never before witnessed. And as Emmy came to this point, she felt as though she had already committed a crime in allowing suspicions so unworthy even to pass through her brain. So of course the treasonable question was suppressed; and, as almost immediately afterwards the threatened rain began to fall pretty heavily, little or nothing more was said during the hurried walk home.

Emmy continued in this penitent and self-accusing mood all the rest of the morning, so that by the time the usual dinner hour arrived, bringing with it the guest who had been invited the day before, she was much more frank and cordial than he had yet found her. She was sure she had done him great wrong, and was determined to make up for it.

"And how is the poor man?" she inquired, as soon as the first greetings and congratulations were over.

"Very much exhausted, of course, but the doctors seem to think he may do very well. I waited with him till the bone was set, and all was going on favorably. But—but I am afraid I have come rather early."

He accompanied the last words with a glance round the room as though he were looking for some one whom he missed. And yet Mrs. Waters and Emmy were both present.

"No," said Mrs. Waters; "we have been expecting you for some time. But we have put dinner off for an hour because of Miss Egerton—she has gone to see the wife of this Evan Griffiths and break the news to her, and, as it is a walk of nearly six miles there and back, I knew we should have to wait."

"A walk of six miles through this rain!" said the visitor, looking surprised and a little concerned as well. "And why—could not some one else—"

"Miss Egerton did not like to trust any body but herself," explained Mrs. Waters. "She was afraid of the poor woman being unnecessarily frightened, and really, if you had seen the two rough boys who were offering to go, you would have said there was some danger."

"Still, I do think," put in Emmy, "it was a

pity to go herself just when it was coming on to rain. She might have told the boys what to say, you know, and that would have done just as well. But that is always the way with Miss Egerton; she never cares for her own trouble if she thinks there is any good to be done. Oh! she is the dearest, kindest—"

Here Emmy bethought herself that there might be a risk of letting out more than she intended, and came to rather an abrupt stop. Mr. Graham, though he had seemed to be listening with some interest, did not say any thing to induce her to resume, and the conversation wandered off to other topics, Olivia's name not being again mentioned till she had herself made her appearance.

She was considerably longer in making her appearance than Emmy had expected. For Emmy had expected that, either forgetting the visitor's presence or not heeding it, she would on her return peep, as usual, into the sitting-room to report herself as she went up stairs. But when the door at last opened, Olivia entered, not in her wet walking-things, but ready dressed for dinner, and very well dressed too, with her rich masses of dark hair disposed in her most becoming style, and with no sign about her of having been out in wind and rain save the heightened color on her cheeks. Emmy thought she had never seen her look so well.

But, well as she looked, well as she was perhaps conscious of looking, Olivia did not enter quite with her usual self-possession. She appeared unwontedly nervous and embarrassed, and lingered for an instant in the doorway, as though she was not very sure whom to speak to first, or in which part of the room to take her place.

Her uncertainty was decided by the visitor, who happened to be sitting near the door, and who immediately rose to offer her a chair.

"Oh! thank you," she murmured, and glided forward to the seat thus placed for her. Here she found herself almost close to Mr. Graham, towards whom, after another interval of indecision, she raised her eyes.

"I must congratulate you on the good work which you performed this morning," she said, not without some appearance of effort.

"The work is yours quite as much as mine," he answered. "If you had not said what you did, I should have had to go alone, or not at all."

Olivia's cheeks grew scarlet. She had been quite tormenting herself during her walk about the incident of which he spoke, finding her chief consolation in the hope that people might have forgotten it altogether. Her behavior must have seemed so unfeminine, on the one hand, so absurdly and impotently mock-heroic, on the other!

"I—I hardly knew what I was saying," she stammered. "I was so excited that I felt as if I could do any thing almost, and I never thought how ridiculous I was making myself. If I had stopped to consider—"

"If you had stopped to consider, Miss Egerton, that man's life would have been lost, at any rate, and perhaps mine too."

She smiled, and shook her head, not knowing what to say. But secretly she felt very much relieved.

"And how is your patient going on?" she asked, presently.

Mr. Graham repeated the substance of what he had already told Mrs. Waters and Emmy, adding, before Olivia had time to speak again:

"You have taken a long walk through the rain to see his wife, I believe."

Again Olivia was a little put out. She would have preferred Mr. Graham to know nothing about her errand to Brookston; he would think she was always meddling.

"It would have been so dreadful if the poor woman had been told roughly or unkindly," she said, half apologetically.

"Was she in a great way about it, then?" asked Emmy.

"Yes, she was in terrible grief indeed. I could hardly get her to believe that things were not worse than they really are. And she seemed such a good, warm-hearted woman, that it made one all the more sorry for her."

"Poor creature!" said Mrs. Waters, sympathizingly. "And there are three children, are there not?"

"Yes, three quite little children," answered Olivia, recovering from her embarrassment in proportion as she became interested in the subject of Mrs. Griffiths and her family. "And they have been unfortunate in so many ways, poor things, without any fault of their own. The husband is a Welshman, and, though he married a Dorsetshire wife, seems always to have been looked on at Nidbourne as a kind of interloper; and then some months ago they lost a little trifle they had laid up by the absconding of the manager of a Savings Bank; and they have had to move—oh! almost every thing seems to have gone against them. And yet their poor little house is so clean and neat—it is quite touching to look at it; and the woman herself is such a good, gentle creature—"

"Mamma," interrupted Emmy, "I think you and I ought to go and see her. Will you take us there to-morrow, Miss Egerton?"

"Very well, dear. I am sure you will be very much pleased."

"Oh! I know that already," said Emmy. "Poor dear woman—I declare I feel quite interested in her. And she was very grateful to you for having taken such a walk on her account, of course?"

"She was very much obliged," answered Olivia, with a slight relapse into confusion, for she did not want this theme of her walk to be further harped upon. She paused an instant, considering how she might divert the conversation altogether from the subject of Mrs. Griffiths and her family, when suddenly she bethought herself that she was making an omission calculated to do the poor woman injustice in the eyes of her chief benefactor, and resumed:

"Oh! Mr. Graham, I should not forget to mention how gratefully she spoke of you and what you have done for her. I can't repeat half of what she said."

"Mr. Graham ought to come with us and see her too," said Emmy, graciously, for she felt that she owed their guest some amends for the coldness with which she had at first treated him. "It is a beautiful walk to Brookston, and if the day is fine it will really be quite a pleasant expedition."

"Thank you," was the instant response. "I should like to go with you very much."

"And then, Miss Egerton," continued "while we are so near, you and I can go to Brookston Mill and take that sketch which we have been always wanting to do. Oh! it will be charming."

Dinner, was just than announced, but they sat down every thing was settled according to Emmy's suggestion, and an appointment for Mr. Graham to call for the ladies after fast next morning, and let himself be taken to Brookston under their guidance.

In spite of the delay which Olivia's visit had occasioned, it was still comparatively in the afternoon when dinner was over, and a good many hours remained to be disposed before the day should be at an end. Therefore it was, moreover, necessary to spend in the the weather continuing such that a walk was to be thought of. But somehow the time did not appear nearly so wearisome to the party assembled within doors as might have been expected, and as certainly Olivia would have expected, could she have been told yesterday morning she would have to pass so many hours in the company of a person who was then a total stranger. As it was, however, even Olivia did not find it dull. Before the evening was over she had covered, once for all, that Mr. Graham was in the least answer to her preconceived notion of an Anglo-Indian, but was a man of taste and scholar, with ideas of his own on music, pictures and books, and ideas which he could well express. And even when he talked of things than these, Olivia did not find him so dull.

CHAPTER XII.

TO BROOKSTON MILL.

THE next day came, and brought a weather little short of perfection. The sun passed away and left no trace behind, but the brighter green of the refreshed grass, shining here and there with rainbow-colored and in the deeper blue of the clear sun overhead. It was spring, and all sorts of objects shone through the purified atmosphere with the brilliancy of relief and color that alone can give. The spruce fronts of cottages or farm-houses shone like dazzling of whiteness dotted over the green land, and the little feathery streaks of vapor flecked the face of the all but cloudless gleamed like snow-wreaths against the sky that glowed beyond. Altogether the day was one of those on which we seem to look at through a medium less gross and obstructive than usual.

The morning being so fine, it was evident the programme suggested by Emmy on the previous day might be safely carried out; and Mr. Graham, calling at the appointed hour, the two younger ladies fully equipped and ready to set out. The two younger ladies on the excitement of the day before had caught Mrs. Waters a severe headache, which, though they would not hear of Olivia and Emmy staying home on her account, made it quite impossible for her to accompany them.

Perhaps partly in consequence of Mrs. Waters' absence, the conversation during the walk

Griffiths's cottage was much more stiff and artificial than it had been within doors the evening before. It is always difficult to take up an acquaintanceship at the precise point where its progress has been interrupted, and in this case the difficulty was increased by the presence of a semi-hostile element in the person of Emmy. For Emmy, in proportion as her admiring recollection of Mr. Graham's self-devotion became less vivid, found herself more and more disposed to revert to the old questions—Who was this Mr. Graham, and how came it that she had never heard of him before? Engrossed in these meditations, she was not in the mood for being so gracious to the visitor as on other grounds she would have wished to be, and he and Olivia were consequently left to carry on the conversation with little or no assistance. Thus thrown on their own resources, the two were very silent and constrained, speaking seldom, and then only as some subject of remark was suggested by the succession of external objects. And yet, tame and trivial as the discourse was, it somehow did not strike Olivia as being so, and this though she was usually peculiarly impatient of commonplace. But then the walk was so pleasant—now leading them athwart sunny fields with nothing overhead save the blue sky and carolling lark, now through shady lanes overhung with sweet-smelling May-blossom—one of the pleasantest, indeed, that she had ever taken.

In due time the party reached their destination—a tiny thatched dwelling standing by itself at the extremity of the straggling little hamlet called Brookston, and giving one by its very situation an idea of more or less forlornness and isolation. Here they found Mrs. Griffiths—a gentle, fair, pleasant-faced woman of the ordinary Dorsetshire type. She was this morning somewhat worn and haggard-looking, as though from want of rest, and yet was clean and tidy in her person, in spite of manifest poverty and the harassment of seeing after three little children, the eldest just old enough to run about and get into mischief, the youngest still an infant in arms.

Olivia's report had not exaggerated the poor mother's gratitude. No sooner did her friend of yesterday introduce Mr. Graham as the gentleman to whom she was mainly indebted for her husband's life, than she broke into a strain of passionate thanksgiving almost incoherent in its fervor, and not a little embarrassing to the person to whom it was addressed.

"You, sir, you—were it you? And me not to know it by only looken into your face! Ah! sir, the Lord in heaven's blessen be wi' you, and my blessen and the children's, vor they shall learn to ask it vor you avore they learn aught besides—vor you and your wife and your children, and every hair of all their heads."

"But I don't happen to have a wife and children," said Mr. Graham, smiling at the flow of her eloquence, and yet apparently wincing under it too, and with an evident desire to bring it to a close.

"Haven't you? Then I hope you soon wull have, and worthy o' you, an' better than that I can't wish you. Oh! sir, forgive me if zoo be I zay mwore than I ought," she added, with sudden terror, as she raised her eyes to her benefactor's face, which a dark flush had overspread. "I woudden offend you—no, not vor the world."

He smiled again—rather a forced, awkward smile, perhaps—but it reassured the poor woman wonderfully.

"I am not so foolish as to be offended with so good a wish as that," he answered; and though there was still something of stiffness and constraint in his manner, it might have been more easily taken for a touch of melancholy than of annoyance. Mrs. Griffiths was quite relieved, and was about to speak again, when he somewhat hurriedly resumed: "You have not asked yet if we have brought you any news. I called at the infirmary this morning, and your husband is going on as well as possible. He was asleep, or I would have asked if he had a message for you."

"Ah! sir, how can I ever zay how thankvul—But I never can, zoo 'tis noo use. And zoo thankvul as he is too, sir, to be zaved to his poor wife and children. Vor I had a sight of en last night, sir, at the invirmory—they couldden deny me when they heard how vur I'd come just vor woon look—and he were as calm and peacevul's a chile, sir, till I come to talk of you, and then he vell a-cryen, and they pushed me out o' the room and zent me hwoime in noo time. He ha' got a good veelen heart, sir, though I zay it that oughtn't, and vor all he comes vom vurrin parts like, he ha' made as kind a husband to me an' the children, and as zober an' hard-worken—Oh dear! oh dear! when I think of it all—"

She broke down in a violent fit of crying.

Mr. Graham looked at her compassionately, then, fumbling in his waistcoat-pocket, said, with a glance round the poor interior:

"I am afraid that while he is laid up you may perhaps have occasion to miss him in more ways than one. Will you accept this as a little assistance in the mean time—just for the present, you know."

And thus saying, he put a couple of sovereigns into her hand.

She looked at them through her tears with astonished eyes.

"What, sir! all thease money vor me! After what the dear young lady—"

She caught Olivia's eye, and subsided into an embarrassed silence. The fact was, she had yesterday received a present of no less than five pounds, but under so strict a promise of secrecy that she was afraid of offending her patroness irretrievably if she added another word. But she had already said enough for Mr. Graham to guess something of the truth—only something, for the idea that Olivia's liberality had been on such a scale did not occur to him for an instant.

Meanwhile Olivia, terribly disturbed at having been so near discovery, was casting about how to bring the visit to a close.

"Emmy dear, if we are to have any time for sketching at Brookston Mill we had better be thinking of saying good-bye. Oh! Mrs. Griffiths, can you tell us which is the nearest way?"

"What! to zee the view all the gentlevolks think zoo much on? Turn into the fields by the gate hard bezide our house, and then keep on by the hedge. And zoo you're a-gwayen already, are you—avore I've zaid a word a'most. But indeed if you stopped all day I never could zay words enough to show how I veel your kindness, sir, and yours, miss—a comen yesterdaz drough the rain to zee me, you know," added the good

woman hastily, as she found herself getting once more on dangerous ground.

"Oh! never mind that," said Olivia, quickly.

"And now, Emmy, really—"

Emmy rather wondered at her friend's impatience, but declared herself quite ready, and shortly afterwards the party, having taken leave as briefly as Mrs. Griffiths's renewed protestations of gratitude permitted, were once more on their way.

In spite of the hurry she had been in, Olivia did not finally part from Mrs. Griffiths till a minute or two after the others, having gone back to the cottage almost immediately on leaving it, under pretext of having forgotten something, but in reality to reiterate her exhortations to secrecy with regard to all donations past or future. On returning to the spot where she had left her companions, just at the entrance of the fields through which they had been directed, she found that Mr. Graham was politely waiting to hold open for her a ponderous five-barred gate which stopped the way. He was alone, Emmy having already strolled forward into the first field, where she was to be seen some distance ahead gathering flowers by the hedge-side. Olivia did not know how it was, but, on finding herself thus waited for, she became all at once very much flurried; not exactly disagreeably so, but still very much flurried.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, as she drew near, and in saying so she blushed, though she was not in an ordinary way a person given to blushing.

He murmured some polite generality by way of reply, then added, as she passed through the gate, which he still held open:

"I see you have been kinder to that poor family than you were willing to let us know."

Olivia faltered something about a "trifle," and blushed still more. The fact of Mr. Graham having found out something which she had not told Mrs. Waters or Emmy, seemed to establish a kind of secret understanding between them. And then, too, she was in trepidation lest the discovery might strike him as inconsistent with her character of poor governess.

"A trifle goes a long way sometimes, Miss Egerton. A few shillings to poor people like those are worth more than a few pounds to others."

She was relieved by finding how little he guessed that a few pounds were what she had actually given, and recovered sufficient self-possession to make the somewhat hypocritical answer:

"Every body ought to do what they are able, you know."

"A very good rule, if only every body was as liberal in fixing the standard of ability as you are. But there are some ladies of large fortune who perhaps would consider they were not able to give more in money than you have given, and I fancy there are none who would think themselves able to give so much in trouble."

Olivia was wont rather to pique herself on her power of parrying a compliment, but this time she felt as helplessly tongue-tied as a school-girl, perhaps because she was also conscious of feeling a sort of school-girlish pleasure in what had been said to her. She was naturally gratified to find that she had so entirely succeeded in keeping her secret. And this was not quite all that gratified her either.

By this time they had nearly come up with Emmy, who was still peeping and botanizing by the hedge-side. On hearing them so near, she rose and came eagerly forward, a bunch of flowers and ferns in her hand.

"Oh! Miss Egerton, see what a beautiful bouquet I am making up. These lovely sprays of double hawthorn—are they not splendid? But there is one flower here that quite puzzles me—look, this little white one. Have you any idea what it is?"

"Not the slightest, except that it is very pretty," said Olivia, examining a little flower which Emmy had pulled out of the bunch; "but then you know I am very stupid at such things. Here, dear, you had better take it home and show it to your mamma."

"Oh! you can keep it if you like; there are ever so many more growing in a little patch, and I am going back to get them. Walk on slowly, and I shall soon follow."

Emmy ran back to her hedge, and Olivia and Mr. Graham went leisurely forward. There was nothing said for some little time, during which Olivia kept bending her head over Emmy's flower with great apparent attention.

"Perhaps you could tell us what it is, Mr. Graham?" she said, at last, when the silence was beginning to appear irksome.

"I! You can not expect a man who has spent half his life in India to know any thing about English wild flowers. I should rather have thought you the person to apply to, living in the country, and—"

"Ah! if I had lived in the country always I should have been an authority, I dare say. But I was teaching in a school in London up to three years ago, and one has not much opportunity of studying wild flowers there."

"Teaching in a school! You have gone through such an ordeal as that!" and he looked at her as though a new phase of her character had been disclosed to him. "Why, that is a life which I have always fancied to be about the hardest and dullest and dreariest that can fall to the lot of any body."

"Well, there is not much excitement about it, certainly. Still I don't know that I found it so very dreadful as you seem to imagine."

"But you are better pleased to live with a pleasant cultivated family than in the most perfect of schools, surely? You are a great deal happier in your present life, are you not?"

He asked the question with an air of such solicitude that Olivia, with the fear of continued inquisition before her eyes, got quite nervous. How should she manage to keep her secret if he catechised her much further? And she was more anxious to keep it than ever. Still, with all this, there was mingled in her alarm a kind of gratification too. It was so seldom that she found herself, apart from her money, an object of interest to any body.

"Well, yes, I think I am happier in my present life," she answered, tremulously; and really, when she came to consider, there was no question that things went far more pleasantly with her now than they used to do. How would she have found time at Miss Lalande's for such a nice walk as this, for instance?

"You think! I should have imagined there was no doubt of it," he said, still with the same

pearance of solicitude. "There must be such want of the ordinary interests of life in an artificial community like a school, whereas in a family, however small it may be—"

"Oh! of course in a family it is much more useful," assented Olivia, as briskly as she could. But, as she spoke, she remembered what a want of the ordinary interests of life she sometimes amid the splendors of Egerton Park, and, thinking herself that her normal state was more solitary even than he seemed to suppose, could not altogether repress a rising sigh.

She felt his eyes instantly turn upon her with keen inquiry, and positively trembled with alarm at what question might be coming next. But at another moment the glance was withdrawn, and when he spoke it was only to say:

"There is Miss Waters coming—a long way behind. Had we not better wait?"

Olivia acquiesced, and as Emmy, on seeing them waiting, came tripping up with accelerated pace, the awkward *tête-à-tête* was soon at an end. Surely Olivia ought to have been very much relieved. And yet, such is the inconsistency of human nature, her predominant sensation, on thus finding herself safe from further questioning, was something akin not so much to relief as to disappointment. She felt somehow stifled and humiliated, as though a slight had been put upon her.

Of course she knew such a feeling to be very ridiculous, but for all that she was some time in getting rid of it, some time in recovering her full enjoyment of the sweet sights and sounds of the spring day. She continued rather silent and reserved until they reached the bare hill platform crowned by Brookston Mill, and there all tongues were loosed in admiration of the surrounding view—made up of glittering blue sea, grassy deep-dotted downs, and an infinite succession of many-tinted fields which, further checkered by white villages and dark green patches of wood, stretched away into the hazy distance till the eye could no longer follow. The view having been fully admired, the next thing to be thought of was the choice of the best possible position for the intended sketchers—a point requiring a great deal of deliberation and consultation. Here the ladies found themselves greatly aided by the taste and experience of their companion, who spared no pains in endeavoring to place them to the best advantage. By the time this important matter was settled Olivia was quite restored to equanimity, and she began her sketch with hearty goodwill, and a zealous desire of profiting to the utmost by the supervision of so good a judge as Mr. Graham. For she never doubted that he was going to watch the progress of the drawings.

But hardly had she made the first few strokes, when he said:

"I think I should like to spend an hour or so in exploring the country yonder; if you are sure I can be of no further use, that is."

"Oh! dear no," Olivia declared, and begged that he would not hurry himself to return; she said Miss Waters could easily go home by themselves. But even in saying this she felt the same vague sense of disappointment stealing over her which she had already experienced. She did not care a pin now whether her sketch turned out well or ill.

He thanked her for her consideration, and de-

parted. A minute or two afterwards Emmy remarked what a delightfully pleasant morning they had been spending, and Olivia assented as a matter of course. Yet, when she came to think of it, she hardly knew whether she had found the morning delightfully pleasant or altogether the reverse. It had been one of the two, or both, but really she could not say which.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLIVIA FINDS SOMETHING TO DO.

FOR a period of several days following the expedition to Brookston Mill, Olivia's impressions continued to be of the same dubious description. She was so unable to strike the balance of her feelings that she actually did not know whether the time was one of intense enjoyment or supreme dissatisfaction.

Certainly, so far as external facts went, she ought to have been enjoying herself. She was fond of an open-air life; and an almost uninterrupted spell of fine weather, now beginning to assume the character of summer rather than of spring, enabled her to spend more time out of doors than ever. She liked to feel herself of use, and in addition to Emmy's lessons, she now had the variety of an occasional walk to Brookston to see Mrs. Griffiths and take her news of her husband's progress towards recovery. Then, as has already been shown, she found Mr. Graham a very pleasant companion, and Mr. Graham was now a daily visitor. Taking every thing together, undoubtedly she ought to have found herself happy, and in a certain sense she did so—happier, indeed, it sometimes seemed to her, than she had ever been in her life before.

And yet all the time there was something unsatisfactory about her enjoyment—something of incompleteness and imperfection which went far to spoil it altogether. Every day she had one or more relapses into that undefinable sense of disappointment which she had twice experienced during the walk to Brookston Mill (it is unquestionably very disagreeable when a person whom you had imagined to be more or less interested in what you were saying suddenly turns off to something else); and as the time drew near for the break-up of the pleasant party at Nidbourne, this uncomfortable feeling became more and more settled. And really, when one considers how happy they had been there, it was only natural that Olivia and every body else should feel a little low-spirited at the prospect of leaving. For the same day which had been fixed for Mr. Graham's journey to Southampton was to witness the return of the three ladies to Chorcombe, where the Laurels had now been put into perfect habitable order. There had been some talk of Austin Waters coming down himself to Nidbourne to fetch them, and to spend a day or two in the company of his old friend, Mr. Graham; but to the great vexation of Emmy, who had fancied that her father's demeanor towards his visitor would certainly enable her to solve the doubts which she still could not help harboring; this plan was given up when the time came to put it into execution. Mr. Waters wrote to say that he found his personal supervision of the building operations at Chorcombe Lodge not to be dispensed with; and as

the tone of his correspondence had from the first shown the progress of the works to be a subject of paramount interest with him, even Emmy could not draw any deduction from this circumstance.

Thus time passed on, always increasing Olivia's tendency to dissatisfaction with herself and others, till at length the date fixed for departure was close at hand—so close that one fine afternoon in the latter half of May she found herself on her way to Brookston to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. Griffiths. She could not have accounted for it, but somehow on that day she felt more out of sorts and out of spirits than she had done yet. On the one hand, she was saddened by the idea of a pleasant episode of her life being so near its end; and on the other hand, she was depressed and humiliated by the profound conviction that in reality it had not been pleasant at all. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," was the moral which she found written everywhere—in her own heart, in the foliage of the lanes, in the sunny slope of the fields, in the glitter of the distant sea. For even the beauties of external nature, set off by the mellow light of the afternoon sun, failed to please her; and the now familiar landmarks of the way only reminded her, when she noticed them at all, how much happier she had been on the day that she had seen them first, walking to Brookston with the rain driving in her face and the wind whistling about her ears. She had not known at the time how much she was enjoying herself, but she knew it now—now that all the enjoyment was over, and only dust and ashes were left behind. Not that even in the recesses of her own mind she interpreted her discontent in terms so definite as these, but the words, if they do not express precisely what she thought, at least express with more or less accuracy what she felt.

It was necessary, at last, to make some attempt at rousing herself, her walk having brought her before the humble dwelling which was her destination. She tapped at the door, which after a short delay Mrs. Griffiths came to open.

"Good-afternoon," said Olivia, in the most cheerful voice she could command. "Well, I have come to bid you good-bye for the present. To-morrow is to be our last day at Nidbourne, and so—But dear me, Mrs. Griffiths, how ill you are looking! What is the matter?"

She had just noticed that the poor woman appeared quite changed since they had met last, three or four days ago—her pale, sunken cheeks, swollen eyelids, and general air of lassitude and languor seeming to tell a tale of bodily suffering.

"I ha' been a-veeling a bit dumpy like, miss, since last time I zeed you. I took ewold two or dree days ago, I think, a-comen hwome vrom the invirmary where I'd been a-zeein' my poor maister—it come on to rain, and I got wet drough, and ha' never been rightly myzelf zince. Be pleased to zit down, miss."

Speaking thus, she crossed the room to bring her guest a chair, but with such feeble, tottering steps that Olivia was quite concerned.

"Take that one yourself, Mrs. Griffiths; this will do for me. Dear me! I am afraid you are worse than I thought."

"My head is zoo' bad, miss," said the poor creature, sinking down on the seat nearest her. "I do hope thik woon idden all over wi' doust, miss, but I ha' done nothen to zet the place to

rights to day—what wi' veelen zoo weak like, and the children to mind, you know," she added apologetically.

"What! the children to mind when you are so ill?" said Olivia, glancing at a corner where the two elder children sat on the floor by the baby's cradle, playing with an old set of battered wooden soldiers. "But you have had somebody to help you, surely?"

Mrs. Griffiths shook her head. "I'm in hopes I shall have to-morrow, miss; vor veelen zoo queer this mornen, I writ to my mother who lives wi' my married zister not mwore than an hour's journey by rail vrom Nidbourne, and I know she's sartain to come by vust train to-morrow if zoo be there's nothen wrong."

"She will not come this evening, then?"

"She woon geet my letter avore the evenen, miss.—Ha' done, Bobby, let her have the soldier back again, there's a good bwoy.—I hope you don't veel ewold a-zitten zoo vor vrom the fir, miss?"

"Cold! Why, it is quite a summer's day."

"Ah yees. I vorgot, zoo it ought to be. But I ha' been zoo ewold all day myzelf—it made me think you mid be ewold too."

She drew her shawl more tightly round her, and shivered. Olivia looked at her compassionately.

"I am afraid you are really very ill. Have you not sent for the doctor?"

"I ha' had noo woon to zend, miss. We han't had a zoul near us all day except the pwoot-man when I called him in to take my letter. Ah! I do veel zoo lwonesome like 'thout my poor dear maister—zoo lwonesome noo one knows."

"He will soon be with you again," said Olivia, soothingly. "But tell me exactly how you feel. Are you at all feverish?"

"I don't know, miss, but, but—" here the words were drowned in a burst of tears. "Oh! miss, you'll think me very wicked to take on zoo, but I can't help it. Vor I keep thinken of poor Mrs. Collins up the way that died last winter of typhus, and it come on just zoo, wi' veelen ewold an' shivery. And oh! if I were to have en, miss, what should I do, wi' my husband a-lyen wi' his poor broken lag and noo woon to look to the children, and they to catch en too, perhaps, vor they do zay as how it is zoo catchen, an' it went drough two or dree of the Collinses— And oh! I never thought o' that, perhaps I'm a-given en to you this very minute. Oh! goo hwome, miss dear, goo hwome, please, or I shall never vorge myzelf."

"I shall go home when I have seen you properly attended to, but certainly not before. Where does the doctor live?"

"Oh! half a mile up the rwoad nearly, in the gert white house o' the right-han' side. But don't trouble about that, miss dear, it wull only take you out o' your way vor nothen. Goo hwome, do pray goo hwome."

"Yes, yes, all in good time. Let me see—the great white house half a mile up the road on the right-hand side. And now can you give me the name of some neighbor who might be willing to come and sit up all night with you and look after the children? It would never do to leave you by yourzelf till morning, you know."

The poor mother cast an anxious look towards the little ones.

"It mid be a good thing if zome woon 'ad some," she admitted, despondingly, "but I don't know who 'tis to be. You zee it idden long we 'a' lived here, and we ha' always kept ourselves zoo quiet to ourselves like— There's Mrs. Cox ust at the bend o' the rwoad wi' the honeysuckle avore the door—she ha' noo childern to mind out a big bwoy, and were very vrienldy last winter a-comen to ask vor water when she were vrozen out. But 'tis noo good; I don't s'pose she would vor all that. No, no, miss, you goo hwome, and don't think noo more about it. I were a gert big baby to make sich a vuss, but the walken zoo many times back'ards and vor'ards to the invirmary, and the vretten, and the lven awake o' nights ha' took all the strangth out o' me like. There, I'm a-veelen better already; 'twere all my vancy, I'll engage. You goo hwome, miss, there's a dear, and I'll tell you what, I'll goo to doctor's myzelf, the air 'ull do me good."

She rose with feverish alacrity, and, making a few hasty steps forward, put up her hand to take down a faded bonnet that hung against the wall. But before she had reached it she tottered, and would have fallen had it not been for the timely assistance of her visitor, who rushed forward and caught her by the arm; and even with this support she stood for a minute or two shaking and trembling so violently that Olivia feared every moment to see her faint away.

"You must go and lie down immediately," said Olivia, authoritatively, as soon as she saw her patient somewhat recovering. The poor woman still murmured something that sounded like an entreaty to "goo hwome," but was too conscious of her own helplessness to offer further resistance. She was indeed very ill—so ill that it was as much as Olivia could do to get her at last laid in her own bed in the next room. This having been done, and the invalid being made as comfortable as the humble means at command admitted, Olivia, having left the bedroom door open so that the mother's voice might, if necessary, keep discipline among the children, took her hasty way towards the doctor's house.

The doctor's house she had no difficulty in finding, but to her great concern the doctor himself was not forthcoming. He had gone out, she was told, on a round of visits, and was not expected home till late in the evening. She was greatly disappointed; but, as there was no other doctor in the place, all she could do was to leave a message begging that he might call on Mrs. Griffiths as soon as he returned, and then to hurry away on her remaining business.

She stopped presently in front of a pretty little cottage half overgrown with honeysuckle; and, having ascertained from a lad who was at work in the tiny garden that this was Mrs. Cox's, she went up to the door and knocked. Her summons was answered by a stout, comfortable-looking woman, evidently the mistress of the house.

"I have called to see if you would mind sitting up to-night with your neighbor, Mrs. Griffiths. She is very ill—much too ill to be left alone, and, besides, there are the children to look after. Do you feel inclined to come? It will be only for one night, for she expects her mother in the morning, and I will make it well worth your while."

Mrs. Cox's face brightened up wonderfully at the last words.

"'Tis very good of you to say zoo, miss," she

answered, dropping a courtesy, "and like your kind heart too, vor I s'pose you be the young lady Mrs. Griffiths is always a-talken about. An' zoo she's ill—deary me, that's a bad job. An' what's the matter?"

"She seems so weak and tired out that I almost fancy low spirits may have something to do with it. But it is right to tell you that she herself is afraid of typhus fever."

Mrs. Cox's countenance fell perceptibly.

"Fever!" she repeated, and half mechanically shook her head.

"You will not go, then?" said Olivia.

"I'd do any thing to oblige a young lady sich as you miss, I'm sure," was the somewhat embarrassed reply. "But I were always mortal afraid of fever, as is but natural, you know, miss, when you think of the zight of volks he cars off, and poor Mrs. Collins only this very year. Zoo I'm sartain you woon't think none the wuss of a poor body, miss, vor veelen a bit shy like; and Mrs. Griffiths I didden know her vrom Adam till she come here six months agoo—an' she a-married to a Welsh chap and all; 'tis my consait woon of theasem volks ought to come and nuss her. You can't blame me vor not a-likin to goo, can you now, miss?"

"Oh dear no! I don't blame you in the least," said Olivia; "indeed, if I knew it was a case of fever I am not sure that I should have asked you. I am sorry, of course, but if you are really afraid there is nothing else to be said."

"I'm sure I'm zorry's any woon can be," said the woman, who, whether from genuine pity for her neighbor's troubles, or from reluctance to forfeit the young lady's promised bounty, did really look very regretful. "'Tis a hard case vor sartain; I don't zee how poor Mrs. Griffiths is to geet drough the night by herself if she's zoo ill—do you, miss? An' yeet, if noo woon 'ull goo to her, what's to be done?"

"Oh! that can be easily managed. I will sit up with her myzelf."

"Zit up wi' her yourzelf! But you be a-joken, miss, sure?"

"No—why should I be joking? I never should have thought of any thing else, only that I fancied you might be able to manage the children better than I could, and then I have friends at Nidbourne who are expecting me back this evening. And that reminds me, perhaps you could manage to get a message sent for me just that they may not be anxious. This is your son, I suppose?" and she turned towards the lad already spoken of.

"Yeas, miss, an' quite at your zarvice," said Mrs. Cox, eagerly, glad to find an opportunity of obliging a person whose generosity she had more than once heard praised by her neighbor. "Here, Tom, come an' show yourzelf," and Tom, thus adjoined, came sidling awkwardly up.

Olivia took a note-book from her pocket, and, tearing out a blank leaf, rapidly wrote a few lines informing Mrs. Waters and Emmy why and where she was detained, and promising to rejoin them on the morrow provided Mrs. Griffiths's illness should turn out to be non-infectious.

Having finished her note, she gave it to the boy with a few words of direction and a couple of half-crowns—a donation so stimulative of zeal that she had the satisfaction of seeing her messenger started on his walk forthwith under the

strictest injunctions from his mother to be quick and lose no time. This matter settled, Olivia prepared to take her way back to Mrs. Griffiths.

"It do vex me, to be sure," dolefully insisted Mrs. Cox, whom a little persuasion might probably even yet have induced to undertake the duties of sick-nurse for a sufficient consideration. "I'm ashamed to think of en, zoo I am—a lady like you a-taken sich a deal o' trouble."

"Oh! you need not mind about that, thank you; I shall be none the worse for the trouble, but all the better."

And so saying, Olivia turned and went blithely on her way. She was actually all the better already for what she was going to do, and felt so happy as she hastened along the road in the pleasant light of the declining sun, that, remembering the poor invalid who awaited her, she was almost scandalized at her own elation.

She made a brief halt at a little provision-shop on the way, and shortly afterwards, laden with sundry packets of tea and sago and arrow-root and jelly and other such luxuries, appeared once more in Mrs. Griffiths's little cottage. Here she found that every thing had gone on well during her absence; that is to say, the children had got into no mischief worth mentioning, and their mother, though still complaining of tremor and chilliness, was, if no better, at all events apparently no worse.

And now it was that Olivia set to work in good earnest. First, of course, she attended to her patient, compounding with the aid of one of the packets aforesaid a warm drink, which had no sooner been taken than it seemed to produce a wonderfully composing effect. Next, having done every thing she could think of to make the mother comfortable, she devoted her energies to the children. It was a long time before the children were disposed of. She had to give them their suppers; and then she had to prepare their night-quarters in a tiny up-stairs chamber which the cottage, by good fortune contained, and where she judged that they would be safer from any possible infection than in either of the rooms down stairs; and then she had to undress them and get them to bed; and then, hardest task of all, she had to induce them to fall asleep amid their unfamiliar surroundings. When this was accomplished, and every thing was quiet above, she came down stairs again, and, finding to her great joy that the invalid had fallen into a doze, she passed noiselessly into the kitchen, where she found occupation for another quarter of an hour in trying to make things look a little tidy for the doctor. Finally, it being almost dusk, she discovered that she was a little tired and thirsty, and set about getting some tea for herself.

She had certainly worked hard for her tea, and deserved to have it in peace. But just as she had sat down and was in the act of pouring out her first cup, somebody tapped at the door, and she had to rise to open it. She was, however, rather glad than otherwise of the interruption, for she naturally thought that this must be the doctor.

She opened the door, and for a moment thought so still. A gentleman was there, whose face she could not distinguish, it being turned towards her, and away from the light of the clear evening sky without.

"Miss Egerton," said a voice she knew—a voice so familiar to her, and at the same time so

unexpected under the circumstances, that its sound set her trembling from head to foot.

It was not the doctor, but Mr. Graham.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLIVIA AND HER VISITOR.

ON recognizing in the new-comer Mr. Graham, Olivia was so much surprised that, fearing lest her discomfiture should be observed, she attempted an explanation.

"I—I did not know you at first. I was expecting the doctor."

"I hope I have not startled you. But I was with Mrs. Waters when she got your message, and it made us—made her—so anxious that—"

"I am very sorry," she stammered, for there was something in his manner that increased her agitation tenfold, "but—but there is nothing for her to be anxious about. I am making myself very comfortable, and—oh yes! you may come in and look if you like," she added as he made a step forward. "You see I am really very well off; this is a very snug little room, and now that my patient is asleep, I have nothing to do but to minister to my own comfort."

She spoke the last words with an attempt at cheerfulness and unconcern which she felt to be so clumsy that she was quite provoked with herself. But Mr. Graham was engaged with his own thoughts, and had not been attending.

"And you think of stopping in this place all night?" he asked, with a glance from her to the poor interior, and then back to her again.

"It was really a case of necessity," she said, apologetically. "I could not get any body else to come, and if you had seen how helpless the poor woman was—"

"But you said something in your note about infection. What is the matter?"

"She has caught a bad cold, and is very weak, and that makes her fanciful and low-spirited. I do not think it is any thing worse."

"Is she afraid of something worse, then?"

"It seems that a neighbor died of typhus fever last winter," admitted Olivia, reluctantly, "and she has taken it into her head that perhaps—"

"Miss Egerton, you must let me take you home at once. It is out of the question that you should expose yourself to such a danger."

He spoke more impetuously than Olivia had ever heard him, and she felt her heart swell with a strange sense of joy and triumph. But in spite of her emotion—emotion which she had much ado to conceal—she still stood her ground.

"You are very kind, but I must stay through this night, at any rate. There is nobody else to be had, and if that poor creature is really ill with typhus fever her life may depend on having some one at hand to watch her."

"But your own life—have you not considered that perhaps you are risking—"

"I have seen you risk your life in a much more dangerous enterprise," said Olivia, with a smile, but as she smiled she felt her eyes grow so dim that she was quite grateful to the friendly twilight which screened her from too searching a scrutiny. "You have been a thousand times more of a benefactor in this house than ever I can be; I won-

grudge me the pleasure of doing a little

"She paused, warned, by a slight break in the subject was not a safe one, and hastily: "And really I don't believe the slightest risk in the matter. I think is only one of severe cold." "What does the doctor say?" asked Mr. Graughtfully.

"doctor!" said Olivia, a little put out. "He has not seen her yet. He was with me when I went to fetch him, and was not exactly till quite late."

"Is he to call here on his return?"

"I left a particular message for him."

"When I will wait till he comes. I should like to hear what he has to say."

Olivia was conscious of a thrill of pleasure so it seemed that there was, at all events, one person in the world to whom her fate mattered of more or less interest without reference to money considerations! She thought it worthy to protest against Mr. Graham's giving himself so much trouble, but she was aware that she did so very feebly.

"I cannot be content to go till I know whether it is safe for you to remain," was all he answered.

Only a new apprehension occurred to her. The first time she regarded the danger of illness as something more than imaginary.

"It is very imprudent," she said, anxiously. "If it should really be typhus—"

It seemed to be quite certain just now it was of the sort," he replied, smiling. "Whatever it may be, you need have no fears of an old Indian like me."

With that all further attempts at dissuasion were useless, and for some time remained silent, partly from an embarrassing not knowing what to say, partly from a feeling of satisfaction with which silence was congenial than words. Presently she remembered that, as Mr. Graham was waiting for her account, she was bound to do what she could to entertain him.

"Do you not sit down?" she said, nervously. "Both have been standing all this time. Perhaps you will let me give you a cup of

tea and both took their places at the table. And now there fell on Olivia a sense of constraint and shyness greater than she yet experienced in the presence of Mr. Graham or of any other human being. It seemed strange to be sitting there pouring out his tea at that little table, in that little room, under the subdued light of the evening sky and the faint flicker of the fire making every object seem dim and unreal. She was at a loss how to bear herself, hardly dared to raise her voice should not be under control, and raised her eyes lest they should meet his looking at her. As Mr. Graham on seemed to be almost equally oppressed by the situation, it need not be said that conversation went very slowly and heavily. Somehow its heaviness did not particularly either of them.

"Will you do if the doctor pronounces?" asked Mr. Graham, after one of the intervals of silence which were constantly

"I shall have nothing to do but to run my chance," said Olivia, as lightly as she could. "I can not leave the poor woman without a nurse in the middle of the night, you know. But I am so little afraid of it, that I don't think I should be liable to infection myself."

"No?"

"No; and as for carrying it to others, a few days of quarantine would make me quite safe in that respect, I suppose."

She paused and bit her lip. Might not Mr. Graham think that for a poor governess she was disposing very coolly of her time? She hastened to put herself right by adding:

"I should be very sorry not to be able to travel with Mrs. Waters, of course. But I was not going direct to her house, so that it will not make so very much difference."

"Not going to her house!" he said, with an accent of surprise. "You are parting from her, then! But not altogether, surely?"

"Oh no! not altogether," faltered Olivia, for she was rather ashamed of the equivocation; and yet, if she wanted to keep her secret, what was she to do? "I—I—am going to spend a little time at home."

"Oh! at home!" he repeated, and was silent for a few seconds. He had never heard her speak of her home before, and felt, as it were, taken by surprise. "Is your home far from here?" he demanded presently.

"It is in Somersetshire," responded Olivia, nervously.

"In Somersetshire! Not very far from Chorcombe, then?"

"N—no, not very."

There was another pause, during which Olivia was considering how she might change the conversation, and Mr. Graham how he might elicit some more information on a subject in which he could not help feeling interested.

"It must be a great pleasure to look forward to, going home to your friends."

"I have very few friends—very few relations, that is," she answered, evasively. "Only an uncle and aunt and cousins."

"No nearer relations than these?"

"No; my parents are both dead, and I never had either brother or sister."

"That is being very lonely."

"Yes," faintly acquiesced Olivia. She knew not how it was, but all her strength seemed gone, and she could not say another word, could not even consider what to say—could only sit with downward-turned eyes and wait for what might be coming next.

There was a very long silence—so long that an invisible spectator who might have been present would have thought that the two had fallen into a kind of waking dream. And in truth, as they sat there in the gathering dusk, with the light from the window growing ever dimmer and dimmer, and the quivering shadows cast by the fire darker and more pronounced, a strange, dream-like influence made itself felt upon both, so that some (not all) of the actualities of the present were well-nigh lost sight of. The outlines of the poor cottage room and poorer furniture, blurred and blotted in the uncertain mingling of the natural and artificial lights, suggested to each of the two a scene widely different from the reality. Olivia could almost have fancied herself in a

certain little parlor in Egerton House where she was accustomed to take tea in the winter evenings, and which she had sometimes found so dull, so dull! but it did not look ~~that~~ ^{now}. And Mr. Graham was half inclined to believe that he was back in his study in Bombay; only who was this that sat near him, filling the hitherto vacant chamber with a sense of companionship? It will be seen that the imaginations of both were in an unusual state of tension.

Still there was nothing said on either side. Once Olivia was aware that Mr. Graham turned towards her as though about to speak, and the flutter of her heart increased tenfold. But almost in the same moment she heard something like a suppressed sigh, and knew that his eyes were withdrawn again. The silence lasted some time longer—lasted till it became absolutely necessary that one of them should break it, and then Mr. Graham remarked what a fine evening it was. Olivia replied that the weather was really quite extraordinary, but, cheerful as the answer was, she felt the old chilling sense of disappointment creeping back upon her as she made it.

"I wish the doctor would come," she said presently; and indeed she heartily wished now that he would, though a few minutes ago she would have been content to wait for him forever.

"He is not later than you expected, is he?"

"Oh no! But it is such a pity you should be kept waiting, and really it is so unnecessary—"

"It does not signify how long I wait. I am not in the slightest hurry."

"You are very kind. I am afraid you must find it very wearisome."

"No, indeed, I—"

He stopped suddenly, and Olivia, to whom the energy of his manner had again imparted a momentary flurry, was left with a disagreeable sensation, half of pique, half of humiliation.

"I must see about a light—it is getting so dark," she said, not perhaps without a touch of petulance; and rising as abruptly as though she had only just made the discovery, she took down a candle from the chimney-piece. She had an idea that this would be the best way of breaking the spell which the mystic-glimmer of the fire-light had cast about her senses, and set about the simple business of striking a light with a feeling almost of defiance.

But she soon found that matters were nowise mended. The shadows conjured up by imagination had indeed vanished, but the reality remained, and was brought into more embarrassing relief than ever. As she put the candle on the table her eyes happened to meet those of her visitor; and the glance made her feel so shy and nervous that, on resuming her place, she hardly knew what to do with herself. She fussed for a minute or two over the empty tea-cups, arranging them with great mathematical precision on two corresponding bunches of flaring flowers coarsely painted on the gaudy blue tray; and then, muttering something about "work," drew a ball of cotton from her pocket and began manipulating a crochet-needle as energetically as though her very life depended on it.

Probably Mr. Graham was almost equally at a loss. He did not speak for some time, and when he did it was only to ask a question, in which *he manifestly could have felt no manner of interest, as to what kind of work Olivia was doing.*

"Why, crochet, to be sure!" said Olivia, with an awkward little laugh, which quite grated on her ear as she heard it—it sounded so affected. "Are you really so ignorant as not to know?"

"I never saw it before, that I remember."

"Never saw it before!" and she tried another little laugh, but it turned out much like the former one. "Are the ladies in India so very idle, then?"

"I can not say what the ladies in India are. I know so little about them."

"What! after living there so long! That is stranger and stranger."

"It is quite true. I have seen more of ladies' society in the last fortnight than I had seen for nearly twenty years before—or than I shall see for twenty years again, probably."

Olivia laughed once more, but said nothing. There had been something in the last words which jarred upon her, and she thought to herself somewhat pettishly what a good thing it would be if that doctor would only come.

The wish was hardly formed when a heavy foot-step was heard, and an authoritative tap sounded at the door. The doctor had really come at last. And yet, oddly enough, now that he had come, Olivia felt as though she would rather that he had staid away a little longer.

Before the summons could be answered the door was opened from without, and the doctor made his appearance—a little, stout, brisk-looking man of middle age, who bustled in as if bent on making up for lost time.

"Well, well, my good soul," he began, cheerily, "and how—" Here, finding himself confronted by a lady and gentleman, he hastened to apologize. "Excuse me, ma'am, excuse me, sir—I really had no idea—"

Olivia briefly explained the circumstances under which she had found Mrs. Griffiths that afternoon, and then, not waiting to receive the gentleman's compliments on her courage, went into the back room to waken the poor woman and prepare her for the visit. In a minute more she beckoned the doctor into the back room also, and Mr. Graham was left alone, waiting not without some anxiety for the verdict.

He had not been waiting long when Olivia returned, with the doctor bustling after her.

"She will soon get well," announced Olivia joyfully, in answer to Mr. Graham's look of inquiry. "And there is no danger of infection whatever."

"The case is one of ague," said the doctor, magisterially—"ague complicated with derangement of the biliary and nervous systems. It might have been very serious if neglected, or in the absence of proper professional assistance, but with skillful and judicious treatment—oh! I don't doubt but what we shall bring her round in a very few days."

"And you are sure this lady will run no risk by remaining here all night?"

"Not the slightest, if the lady is so kind as not to object to the trouble. Let me see—" and the doctor pulled out a ponderous watch which he was fond of consulting on all occasions—"it is rather late for finding any body to relieve you but—"

"But I don't want to be relieved, thank you. I am getting quite used to my duties now, and won't give them up to a stranger."

"Well, well, you are very kind, I'm sure—~~make~~ a good Samaritan, eh? And now I'll go ~~come~~, if you please, and see about sending the medicine—once every four hours, you know. And you can give her a basin of hot gruel for ~~upper~~ as soon as you can get it ready—just to ~~reduce~~ a gentle perspiration. Hum—my hat and gloves—I think I put them—"

While the doctor was fumbling about for his things Mr. Graham went up to Olivia.

"I think I had better leave too," he said, putting out his hand. "It is getting very late, and have a long way to go."

"Oh yes! of course," answered Olivia, and ~~out~~ out her hand also. But though she was so ~~eady~~ ready to say good-bye, she felt a singular sensation of blankness and desolation come over her as she discovered that she was thus going to be ~~eft~~ alone.

By this time the doctor had found his hat and gloves, and with a polite bow was preparing to ~~depart~~. Mr. Graham followed him to the door, and both gentlemen passed out together.

The cottage stood a little way back from the ~~oad~~, so that they had a score or two of yards to go before they separated.

"Uncommonly good of the lady, to be sure," remarked the doctor as they went down the little field-path. "I don't believe you would find me in a thousand to do as much—that I don't. No joke to sit up all night in a place like that, you know."

"It is very kind of her, certainly," assented Mr. Graham, meditatively.

"Wonderfully kind, I call it," declared the doctor. "And equally so of you to allow it, of course."

"Of me!" said Mr. Graham, with a start.

"Yes, 'pon my word I think it is. But well, some wives deserve more of their own way than others, don't they? And now, sir, this is my road; let me see, which is yours? Down to Nidbourne, I suppose? Ah! then we must part company. A nice mild night for a walk, that's one thing. Good-evening."

"Good-evening," answered Mr. Graham, in rather a stifled voice.

"I hope you will get the lady back all right in the morning, and none the worse for her fatigues," and with these parting words the little man moved off.

It was a good thing he did not wait for a reply, for Mr. Graham found himself for the moment quite unable to make one. All his faculties had been suddenly thrown into unwonted turmoil, and for some time he stood rooted to the spot in a reverie which he could not shake off. Did the doctor think, then, that—that he and Olivia— And yet evidently the doctor thought so; what else could he have meant? What a strange mistake to make! and yet perhaps a natural mistake, when one came to think of it—there was nothing intrinsically impossible, or even improbable—nothing but what, indeed, under other circumstances—

He roused himself with a violent effort; time was running on, and he had his walk in prospect. But before setting out he cast one look back at the cottage. The night, though clear, was moonless and almost starless, and the little dwelling would hardly have been distinguishable from the darkness surrounding it but for a light which

showed through one of the windows. He knew that this was the window of the room where he had been spending the evening, and he took an unaccountable pleasure in gazing back on it and picturing to himself all that was behind it. Then again he roused himself, and turned his face towards Nidbourne.

The prospect was very gloomy and desolate. So much of the road as was visible through the darkness stretched before him in a dreary, monotonous line, bordered on each side with ghostly-looking hedgerows, and here and there with ghostlier-looking trees, which swayed and nodded with grim funereal motion in the night breeze. He could not forbear glancing round once more at the cottage window. The light was still there, glowing as brightly and cheerfully as ever, and seeming to send forth a friendly message of hope and gladness through the night. He half involuntarily made a step towards it as he looked.

He paused and again cast his eyes in the direction of Nidbourne, but again drew a step nearer the lighted window. Then for a minute or two he stood still and wavered, looking first one way and then the other, as though doubtful which to choose. At last, with what seemed to be a sudden influx of energy, he took his resolution, and with a step rapid and no longer faltering made straight for the cottage. The door was not yet fastened for the night, and lifting the latch gently he pushed it open and looked in.

He stood for a while motionless on the threshold, not pausing this time, however, in doubt or indecision, but simply because his gaze was riveted and he could not withdraw it. Not that any thing was going on in that humble interior which to an ordinary observer would have been specially interesting. The invalid's gruel was being prepared, and the self-appointed nurse, her face turned away so that the features could not be discerned, was standing at the fire to watch it—nothing more than this. And yet he gazed as though that commonplace business of gruel-making had been the spectacle in all the world the best worth studying.

"Olivia!" he said at last, making a step forward.

He had got to think of her as Olivia by seeing that name affixed to some of her drawings, and just now it rose so naturally to his lips that he was in utter unconsciousness of having said any thing unusual.

She started violently, and looked half round, then let her eyelids droop, and with partially averted face stood in trembling silence before him. His return had taken her altogether by surprise, and yet evidently it was something more than surprise that agitated her.

"Olivia, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Her breath came and went so quickly that she could hardly stand. She stretched out one hand towards the chimney-piece to save herself from falling, putting up the other before her eyes with an involuntary attempt to conceal an emotion of which she was half ashamed.

In spite of her averted face, in spite of her eyes covered with her hand, there was something in her manner which inspired him with hope rather than fear. He advanced nearer, near enough to touch the folds of her dress, and, finding that she made no motion to avoid him, ventured to put his hand gently on that with which she still

grasped the chimney-piece. She did not withdraw it, and in another moment his fingers had closed round it with a strong, tender clasp—a more effectual support than the chimney-piece ten thousand times. He felt now that he had not hoped in vain, and yet he longed to hear his hopes confirmed by her voice.

"Won't you speak to me? won't you look at me—just one word, one look, to let me know that I may be happy? For my happiness all depends on you, Olivia, or rather I never knew what happiness could be till you taught me."

She turned her eyes towards him for an instant—only for an instant, for she shrank from letting him see the depth of gladness that was in them.

"Oh! Mr. Graham!" she murmured, and then stopped, unable to say a word more.

"Mr. Graham!" he echoed, reproachfully.

"Henry, then," she whispered, blushing.

She knew his name was Henry, because she had once heard Mrs. Waters tell Emmy so, and though the information was never repeated she had not forgotten it.

He put his arm round her—no fear of her falling now, though chimney-pieces had never been invented—and drew her close to his heart.

"My darling, my own darling, my wife!" and then he was silent from very excess of joy. When he spoke next it was to say, smoothing the glossy braids of her dark hair caressingly the while: "Let it be Harry, love, from you—that was my name when I had a home, and it must be my name again."

"Harry," she repeated, deliberately; but though she cunningly made it appear that she was trying how the word sounded, she had really spoken it for no better reason than because uttering his name was a pleasure to her.

"Do you not like it best too?" he asked.

"I think I do. But—but—"

"But what?"

"But then I should like best any name that was yours," she managed to answer, calling all her courage to her aid.

"Olivia!" he exclaimed, and acknowledged the compliment with a rapture that made her feel half guilty for having paid it.

Each of the two was so happy in the other, that by this time they had forgotten the existence of every thing and every body in the world beside, and there is no saying how long this pleasant oblivion might have lasted but for an untimely interruption which just then took place. A nightmare dream, sent perhaps for that express purpose by some malicious spirit, chanced to wake one of the children up stairs, who forthwith began to cry so lustily as to disturb not only the two other little sleepers above, but the invalid in the next room, whose voice was heard feebly demanding what was the matter.

"There, I am wanted," said Olivia, looking up into her lover's face with a bright smile, while with difficulty she disengaged her hand. "Good-night—no, you must not keep me another moment."

"I may wait till you come back," he pleaded.

"No, no, it may be an hour before I get them to sleep again, and it is so late—There, you hear" (the disturbance still continued unabated)—"I must really—good-bye—Harry." She did not know how she found effrontery enough to add the last word, but she found it somehow.

"Good-bye, then, but I will come to claim treasure in the morning." As he spoke he tained her, in spite of her hurry, for one old stant, and then, releasing her all covered blushes, tore himself away and plunged in dark night without, only it did not appear now.

Meanwhile Olivia, having first looked in a friendly word to the poor mother, ran up in great haste to restore order. But no standing her haste, which left her no time for reflection, she knew without reflection that she was happy—intensely, ecstatically happy, happier she had ever been, or had ever imagined it to be, in her whole life before.

CHAPTER XV.

ACROSS THE FIELDS.

THE morning sun shone brightly on Griffiths's little cottage, lighting up as with a sparkle of a thousand diamonds the rustic wall which last night had sent that friendly man through the darkness, kissing into fuller life fresh spring foliage of surrounding trees and hedges, filling the air with the scent of wild flowers and the song of birds, and, in a word, making of the spot a very paradise upon earth. And so the spot appeared to Mr. Graham, as he approached it this morning in quest of his betrothed.

He found Olivia liberated from her attendance in the sick-room, and ready to set out. Nothing had gone perfectly well since he had left her the evening before, a good night's rest had done wonders towards the patient's recovery, this morning the expected relief had arrived in the person of Mrs. Griffiths's mother—a warm old soul, whose gratitude to the gentleman who had saved her son-in-law's life, and to the lady who had done so much for her daughter, was quite embarrassing in its effusiveness.

As soon as it was possible for them to get without wounding her feelings, Olivia and her lover started on their walk, followed to the door of the cottage by the old woman, who could stand there as long as they were in sight, blessing them God-speed. Something of the joy which overflowed their hearts must have shown itself externally in their manner or expression, for she evidently had a shrewd notion of what was going on.

"God bless you both, and make you as happy as you have made us these days, and a better blessing than that the parson himself would be able to give you."

The words made Olivia blush very unaccountably, and yet on the whole she could not but be gratified that they had been spoken. The good sense of an old country-woman imported little or nothing, doubtless, in a philosophical point of view, but Olivia, walking from the cottage by the side of her future husband with that simple confidence of her future husband with that simple confidence of benediction sounding in her ears, could not but feel that she was entering on her new existence under a fortunate augury.

The cottage and its occupants were left out of sight and out of hearing, and silent lovers, quitting the road which had looked dreary and monotonous the night before—now it would have looked dreary or monotonous—took their way across a green stretch of

meadow-land in the direction of Nidbourne. For some time they walked on without speaking, but more eloquent than any words were the glances which (accidentally of course) were every now and then exchanged between them—glances that dyed Olivia's cheeks with blushes half of shame, half of grateful joy and pride that knew no bounds. Never in her life had she looked half so radiant, never in her life had she felt half so exultant. So at last that which she had sometimes dreamed of, but never in sober earnest looked for, was a reality, and she was loved, loved for her own sake, loved by one so noble and good and generous that his love was the highest of all earthly honors. As she thought these things she would lift her eyes for an instant, and then, another accidental glance being exchanged (for she always found him looking too), would withdraw them again in great haste, ashamed that he should see how proud she was of him, and yet prouder of him than ever—prouder than ever of herself for the tenderness and admiration that his face had expressed. And her loving pride made her appear so beautiful—beautiful with a beauty far transcending that which any of her flatterers had ever tried to persuade her of—that the next time she looked she would find his face expressing more tenderness and admiration still.

"You do not regret what happened last night?" he whispered at last on one of these occasions, but the lover-like pressure of her hand with which he accompanied the question showed that he asked it rather to make a joyful assurance doubly sure than in any doubt as to the reply.

"Regret!" she exclaimed, and turned towards him a look so beaming that any amount of doubt must have dissolved under it; then in confusion she lowered her eyes again, and, partly to divert attention from herself, partly perhaps from a latent instinct of coquettishness, asked nervously: "And you—are you so very sorry then?"

She felt his arm steal round her for answer.

"Ah! my darling, if you only knew how happy I am—too happy almost, for I am afraid sometimes of waking and finding it all a dream. Thank Heaven, I know it is true, but when I think of the difference between yesterday and to-day, I can hardly believe that such difference can be—yesterday a poor lonely wretch with no idea of being other than a poor lonely wretch all my life long, and to day—" He did not finish the sentence, but folded his arm round her closer still.

"With no idea up to yesterday of—of any thing else?" said Olivia after a moment's pause. "Dear me! I am afraid it was very imprudent to make up your mind so suddenly."

The words were spoken in a tone of light railery, but she was inwardly conscious of a slight sense of pique as she uttered them. Had he never thought of her, then, before yesterday? And she had thought of him so many, many times.

Perhaps he divined something of what was passing in her mind, for he answered, apparently by way of explanation:

"I had made a resolution never to marry, and could not decide to break it till the very last. And I think I should have had strength to resist breaking it always, only that as I know I am not taking you away from a home of your own—"

"And supposing you had been taking me away from fifty homes?" put in Olivia, seeing that he came to an abrupt stop. "Have you such a

mean opinion of yourself, such a mean opinion of me, as to think—"

"I—I mean that—that—living in India, you know," he explained in some confusion, "it would be a sacrifice which I should have had no right—"

"But, dear me! living in India is no such dreadful hardship," said Olivia, still rather perplexed.

"I—I am obliged to live for months together in very wild places sometimes," he went on, gradually regaining his wonted manner, "and then I shall either have to leave you behind, or take you with me to some cramped little hut where you would have no single comfort that in England you have been accustomed to."

"I won't be left behind, at all events," said Olivia energetically.

He repaid the promise with a tender caress.

"My own Olivia! I would not be so selfish, but that I know it will be the care of my whole life to make you happy, and I believe that I shall succeed."

She smiled gratefully, but did not answer. She was thinking what a far different home awaited them in reality from that to which he looked forward, and rejoiced over her wealth as she had never rejoiced yet. Ah! what happiness was hers—to be able to reward his disinterested love with lands and honors, and yet know all the time that it was disinterested; to be able to place in a station worthy of him the man whom she was so proud of, and who had been ready to share his all with her supposed poverty! How surprised he would be to find that he had not chosen a dowerless bride, after all; and what pleasure she would have in making the announcement—such pleasure that she felt half tempted to forestall it by telling him at once. But she had already sketched out a little programme of her own as to the mode in which he was to learn the truth; and as this was neither the time nor place for putting it into execution, she resolved to keep her secret a while longer.

"You would much prefer England to India if it were not for your business, I suppose?" she said, following up the train of her own thoughts.

"I never shall live in England," he answered gravely.

"No, because it is necessary that you should live abroad—I quite understand that. But if it were not necessary, you would prefer England, would you not?—just as I suppose you would prefer reading books or writing them, to making railways and canals?"

"Oh! in that case, of course— But I don't by any means dislike my work, I can assure you."

"And yet I should have thought it was not at all the kind of work for which you were best suited naturally."

"So perhaps I should have thought myself once, but it was the only kind of work I could get to do at a time when I was obliged to do something, and of course I could not refuse it."

"You did not exactly choose it, then?"

"Oh, no! On my passage out from England I made acquaintance with a person who was on his way to India as an engineer, and as he was kind enough to offer me an opening, I accepted it. And now I have come to take an interest in the business for its own sake."

Olivia was once more silent, giving herself up to the contemplation of her own privileges. How pleasant to know that by her means he was to be released from work that was evidently only half congenial to him, and to exchange a life of exile and comparative drudgery for the ease and refined luxury of an English home! Again she felt tempted to confess the truth without further delay, but again on consideration could not bring herself to spoil the pleasure she anticipated from disclosing it later in her own way. If only there was no danger of his being in the least degree annoyed with her afterwards for the concealment! But that was surely impossible; he could not grudge her a few hours further possession of a secret which it gratified her to keep, and which, after all, was so infinitely inferior in importance to that other secret which she had allowed him to discover of her heart of hearts. Nevertheless she was disposed to find out if she could how far there was any possibility of her temporary reticence being distasteful to him.

"Is it not strange to think how much we seem to know of one another, and all the while how little we have heard of each other's history?" she said presently. "Why, you know absolutely nothing about me, except that you found me living with Mrs. Waters, and that my only relations are an uncle and aunt and cousins in Somersetshire, and yet—"

"I know as much about you as you know about me," he interposed somewhat hastily.

"But still wonderfully little when one comes to think of it. However, I suppose you feel about it much as I do, and that is, that when I know *you* so well I don't care about the string of dates and names and dry facts which would represent you best to other people."

He did not speak for a few seconds, and then it was with a voice which showed how deeply this testimony of her love had moved him.

"Olivia! You can really put so much faith in me as that?"

"Can't you put as much in me, Harry?"

His only reply was a look of ineffable tenderness.

"You are not going, then, to be a dreadful jealous tyrant, always trying to find out my secrets, if I have any?" she went on.

"My own treasure! I have found out already that you are worthy of all love and all trust, and what do I care for finding out more?"

"Ah! then I see you really feel towards me as I feel towards you," she said, with a shy yet loving glance upward. His face happened to be turned away, so that he did not see the glance, but his manner gave sufficient acknowledgment of the words which had accompanied it.

There was a momentary pause, and then, with his face still averted, he asked, in rather low tones:

"You mean to say that if I had a secret to keep from you, you would love me all the same and trust me to keep it still?"

"Ah! would I not, Harry? One secret or a thousand."

He did not answer save by a long-drawn breath, but she knew by his very silence how glad he was made by this declaration of her confidence, and therefore of her love.

In the exchange of lover-like assurances such as these, and in discussions of a more practical

but no less agreeable nature as to the arrangement of that future which they were henceforth to have in common, the pleasant morning walk was made to look very short. Thus, almost before they knew whither they were going, they found themselves at the door of the house which Olivia for the present called home, where, having made an appointment for another meeting later in the day, when the relations between them should have been made known to Mrs. Waters and Emmy, they parted—Mr. Graham to return to his lodgings, Olivia to go up stairs to her friends and give the best account of herself that she could.

She never knew exactly how she got through her task. Mrs. Waters, who fortunately was alone in the drawing-room when she entered it, began asking a multiplicity of questions—as to how she had passed the night, as to the state in which she had left Mrs. Griffiths, as to the effect of so much fatigue upon herself—and then somehow the conversation got round to Mr. Graham. And presently Olivia found herself sitting on the sofa with her hand fast locked in that of her friend, trembling and blushing and stammering, in a manner utterly inconsistent with her supposed claims to superior strength of character, and giving up her confession piecemeal in reply to interrogations from which she shrank even while she invited them. At last, gradually, and by dint of a great deal of cross-examination and hypothetical filling up of hiatuses, Mrs. Waters was put in possession of the three great facts that Mr. Graham had said he loved Olivia, that Olivia loved Mr. Graham, and that the two were to be married as soon as might be.

Olivia was prepared to be warmly congratulated, but she had hardly expected from a person so comparatively undemonstrative as Mrs. Waters usually was the display of affectionate tenderness with which her tidings were received. No sooner did Mrs. Waters fairly understand what had happened than she drew Olivia towards her with a fondness which took her by surprise even in the midst of her emotion.

"Dear, dear Olivia—" it was the first time that Mrs. Waters had ever called the heiress by her Christian name. "God bless you—God bless you both!"

"Dear Mrs. Waters!" responded Olivia gratefully, "how kind and good you are! more like a mother to me than any thing else—or a sister, I ought to say," she added, bethinking herself that this was the most complimentary way of putting it.

A short silence ensued, and then Olivia spoke again.

"Then you quite approve of my choice?" she asked with downcast eyes, but she put the question rather because she wanted to hear the praises of her betrothed than because she had really any doubt on the subject.

"Ah yes! Olivia—I am sure nobody could make a better one," answered Mrs. Waters, with even more warmth than her friend had expected. "So—so far as I know, of course I mean."

"And what you don't know of him I do," said Olivia proudly. "I know that he has chosen me believing me to be a poor governess with no home of my own, or chance of a home but through his generosity; I know that he is the most noble, disinterested— And that reminds me, dear Mrs.

Waters, Egerton Park and all about it must be kept secret a little longer."

Mrs. Waters looked rather dismayed.

"What! does he not know yet?"

"No, and I don't intend him to know until we get to Chorcombe. I forgot to tell you; it is settled that he is to go with us to Chorcombe for a few days, only a few days for the present—at least so he thinks, but I hope the discovery of Egerton Park may make a difference. In the mean time he says he must return to India by this mail, just as if—as if nothing had happened, you know; only he is going by Marseilles instead of Southampton, and that will give him a little more time. So you will ask him to stay two or three days at the Laurels, won't you, Mrs. Waters dear? He thinks I am to be at the Laurels too."

"But have you really not told him yet? Oh! Olivia—Miss Egerton—I am afraid—"

"Why, what is there to be afraid of? If he thought I was good enough for him when I was a poor dependent he won't change his opinion when I am a rich lady, surely? If it had been the other way indeed, and he had been another man— But at all events you won't betray me, now that the mischief is done and can't be undone?"

"Oh! of course I will do just what you wish," said Mrs. Waters with a feeble smile, but in spite of the smile, she still looked so uncomfortable that Olivia was quite puzzled.

But Olivia had soon something else to think of. Emmy came into the room at this juncture, and it was necessary that the event of the day should be made known to her also.

When her mother told her that Miss Egerton was engaged to Mr. Graham, Emmy looked more surprised than ever she had looked in her life before. She was so much surprised that it was some time before she recovered herself sufficiently to offer her congratulations to Miss Egerton as in duty bound. And somehow, when she did offer them, though she tried to make them as cordial as possible, she was aware that she did not succeed nearly so well as she would have done if Miss Egerton's choice had fallen on almost any body else. The fact was, she had never quite got over her original prejudice against Mr. Graham.

And yet it was surely very foolish to harbor any remnant of that prejudice now, and so she acknowledged to herself when she came to think the thing over. She had only had one reason for ever feeling the faintest distrust of Mr. Graham, whom personally she liked rather than otherwise; and that reason was founded on a suspicion the groundlessness of which she might now regard as all but absolutely demonstrated. Miss Egerton was going to marry him, and certainly her mother would not stand by silently to see her unsuspecting friend united to a felon—not if he were ten times her brother. So there was obviously an end of the matter, and the sooner all recollection of her silly prejudice was got rid of the better.

Thus Emmy concluded; but, in spite of her conclusion, she could not help feeling rather curious to see whether her father would be as willing to extend hospitality to the stranger as her mother had been.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW HOME.

On the afternoon of the following day three ladies and a gentleman alighted on the platform of the rustic little railway station which gave Chorcombe a right to consider itself part of the great system of European civilization. The travellers had left Nidbourne that morning, and were no other than Mrs. Waters and Emmy, Miss Egerton and Mr. Graham, the last of whom had been duly invited to spend a few days at the Laurels, according to Olivia's proposal.

Immediately on leaving the train both Mrs. Waters and her daughter looked round with a half-expectation that Austin might be waiting to receive them. They soon saw that this was not the case; but before they had time to feel disappointment, a very tall footman, with powdered head and large white calves, advanced with every mark of profound respect to inquire if the ladies were Mrs. and Miss Waters. They duly answered the question, though in considerable astonishment, when, to their infinitely greater astonishment, he instantly possessed himself of their cloaks and travelling-bags, with the explanation:

"I will put them in the carriage, madam."

And, looking the way which he seemed to indicate, they saw just outside the station door a gorgeously panelled open carriage, drawn by a couple of bright bays with proudly arched necks and glossy coats that seemed to fling back the sunshine. As this splendid vision burst on Emmy's gaze, she could hardly persuade herself that it was not all a dream.

But it was no dream, and, following the obsequious footman with the cloaks, all four travellers went forward, and had presently taken their places in that sumptuous equipage in as matter-of-course a style as though none of them had ever been accustomed to any thing meaner. All four travellers, for, by private compact with her friends, Olivia, instead of going straight to Egerton House, was to accompany them home to dinner at the Laurels, where Austin had that morning been informed by a letter from his wife both of Miss Egerton's incognito and the reason for it.

Who shall say with what feelings Emmy leaned back on the cushioned seat of the carriage—her own carriage, or at least the carriage which ever hereafter was to be at her command?—who shall say with what new balminess the breeze played upon her cheek, with what new radiance the sun lighted up every thing on which her eyes fell? As she found herself borne in luxurious motion through the streets of her native place, she could hardly believe that they were the same which she had known formerly, so unfamiliar did they appear as seen from her present unaccustomed elevation. Perhaps it was something more than the mere change of material point of view which made them look so strange, for she had driven through them once or twice in Miss Egerton's carriage without observing any particular difference; but it did not occur to her to make this reflection now—she could only marvel, without trying to account for it, at the alteration which seemed to be in all things and all people. Nowhere did this alteration strike her so much as in the part of the village which she knew best—the street where she had been born, and where she had lived all her life until within the last few

weeks. As she recognized the shabby little house which had been her home so long, she could hardly believe that it was the same, could hardly imagine it possible that she and those belonging to her had really lived in such a place—a place of which she felt so ashamed that she fervently hoped its history might be unknown to the magnificent footman behind, and the no less magnificent coachman in front. And yet, as she could not help remembering with a pang of something like self-reproach, she had been very happy in that place sometimes—in those far-off days (how far-off they looked now!) when she and her mother sat sewing at the window on sunny afternoons, and sometimes on half-holidays would see—

Why, who was this coming round the corner? Was it—yes—no—yes, it was; and he saw her—he was bowing—and of course she too—And Emmy made a little inclination of the head to a person who was just raising his hat towards the carriage, and whom in another moment the flying wheels had borne her swiftly past.

Yes, actually that had been John Thwaites. Dear me! Emmy glanced round at the three other occupants of the carriage, and, finding that they were all busy with their own talk in evident ignorance of the encounter, she heaved a slight sigh behind her parasol. Poor John Thwaites! She could fancy he looked a little paler and thinner than he used to do—ah! she knew what that would be owing to. And what a depressed melancholy look there had been in his eyes as the carriage went whirling past him!—yes, the carriage must have reminded him anew of the distance that separated her—ah well!—and she sighed again. For of course he must have known it was their own carriage; he could never be so stupid as to think any thing else, surely. Unless indeed he might have taken it into his head that it was Miss Egerton's, as she was with them—it was very provoking really that Miss Egerton had not ordered her own carriage like other people. But then it was quite impossible he could have made so silly a mistake. Dear! dear! to think of meeting him for the first time for so long, and under such circumstances too! It was very strange—so strange that Emmy could do nothing else than ponder on it all the rest of the way.

They had passed through the village, and had gone some little distance beyond it, when she was roused at last by the stopping of the carriage before a handsome gate, belonging, as she knew, to the house which in the mean time was to be her home. As the gate swung back on its hinges to admit them, disclosing the hitherto unknown land beyond, she looked up with new interest in external objects, while John Thwaites once more retreated far into the background.

It was a handsome place, this temporary new home of hers—quite handsome enough to distract the thoughts of one so little accustomed to grandeur as Emmy. A broad gravelled carriage sweep, with shrubs and flower-beds on one hand and a spacious lawn on the other, led up to the house—a white-stuccoed, dashing-looking dwelling of the kind described in Mr. Jupp's list as a very superior gentlemanly villa residence. As the carriage-wheels sounded on the gravel, the door of the house was thrown open, and Emmy, *looking eagerly towards it for her father, saw, not him, but another resplendent creature with*

powdered head and large white calves, and three or four smart maid-servants clustering behind. No wonder indeed if she felt very much elated.

She was so much elated that she forgot to look again for her father, until, having been duly assisted to alight, she stood with her fellow-travellers in the handsomely proportioned hall.

"Papa is quite well, I hope?" she asked one of the white-headed footmen, as she gazed round in wondering admiration, with which some surprise at her father's absence now began to be mingled.

"Master is quite well, thank you, miss. Master is in the library, I believe."

Emmy was just going to ask where the library was when a dark-grained door painted in imitation oak was slowly opened, and Austin Walters appeared on the threshold.

He stood looking at the group with a doubtful, almost bewildered, air, and without seeming to observe Emmy, till, unable to restrain her impatience, she made a step forward and threw herself on his neck.

"Good child! good child!" he muttered, holding her for a moment in his arms; then, releasing her, he advanced to bid welcome to the rest.

Mr. Graham was standing a little apart from the others, but, somewhat to Emmy's surprise, her father went up to him first.

"How do you do, Mr. Graham?" but Emmy observed in his manner a singular want of his accustomed geniality.

The host and guest shook hands, and Emmy expected that her father would immediately turn to greet Mrs. Waters and Olivia. But he still remained standing before Mr. Graham almost as though he had no eyes for any body else.

"I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

"Very pleasant indeed. Oh! Mrs. Waters, I beg your pardon."

With this Mr. Graham stepped aside to make way for his hostess, and Austin, thus reminded, went forward and pressed his lips on his wife's cheek, after which he turned to give a welcome to Miss Egerton. Then he looked towards Mr. Graham again, and stood silent, with something of the same bewildered air as before.

"I am really very glad you have had a pleasant journey," he said at last.

Mr. Graham again declared that he had enjoyed the journey very much, and then there was another constrained pause. It was evident to Emmy that her father, though not willing to wound his guest's feelings by open neglect, was not altogether at ease with him.

"Shall I show the gentleman up to his room, sir?" asked one of the footmen, coming opportunely to the rescue.

"Ah yes! to be sure," said Austin, rousing himself. "Shall they show you up to your room, Mr. Graham? let me see, it only wants about three-quarters of an hour to dinner-time."

Mr. Graham acquiesced; and as Mrs. Waters (in whose manner also a shade of constraint had been visible) turned to Olivia and said that they had better be thinking of going up stairs too, the little assembly was quickly broken up. Emmy, however, still remained below. She wanted to exchange further greetings with her father, and perhaps she was not averse to the idea of finding out, if she could, something about Mr. Graham. But even the subject of Mr. Graham waned in

"They are fine trees, are they not?" said Olivia, availing herself of a momentary pause in a conversation which to Mr. Graham had been so all-engrossing that he had had no eyes for trees or any thing else except Olivia's face. "They belong to a private park."

"Oh indeed!" said Mr. Graham, with as little interest as it was possible for him to feel in any remark made by his betrothed.

"Yes," said Olivia faintly, for she was afraid that he might inquire whose park it was. But the question never occurred to him.

They went a few yards in silence, and then Olivia, still speaking rather faintly, resumed:

"Suppose we go in and look at the grounds? They are free to any respectable person."

"I think it would be almost better to keep to the open country," said Mr. Graham, who did not like the idea of his delicious *tête-à-tête* with Olivia being interrupted by a parley with a gate-keeper or gardener. "I don't care for places where one is only admitted on sufferance."

"Oh! but indeed you need have no feeling of that sort here. The people at the lodges know me quite well; Emmy and I wander about under the trees all day sometimes. And really I should like you to see the grounds; they are considered very pretty."

"Oh! by all means, then," said Mr. Graham, to whom the matter was, after all, one of nearly complete indifference.

In a few seconds more they came to a place where there was a break in the high stone wall, and where, on the other side of a handsome iron gate, there was visible a pretty little cottage, evidently a gardener's house or porter's lodge, with a well-kept carriage-road winding upward through an avenue of trees.

"This is one of the entrances," said Olivia, and she put her arm through the rails of a little side-gate, which was a kind of supplement to the larger one; then, lifting an inside latch with all the dexterity of a practised hand, she stepped quickly across the threshold. As she held the gate open for Mr. Graham, a man appeared at the door of the little house, who immediately pulled off his cap, and hurried forward to assist. She motioned him back, however, with a wave of her hand.

"Ah! how do you do, Hopkins? No, thank you, don't trouble yourself. This way, if you please" (the last words were spoken to Mr. Graham). "You see I am very well known here, as I told you."

And the lovers passed together under the thickest shadow of the trees, while the man retreated into the house.

"I hope you like these dear old trees, Harry?" asked Olivia, slipping her arm within that of her betrothed. "I do so want you to like whatever I like, you know."

"They are magnificent trees, certainly," he said, rousing himself to take an interest in the scene, and looking round with genuine admiration. And indeed it would have been impossible to look round and not feel admiration at the sight of those stately moss-grown trunks, hoary and gnarled with age below, and yet above decked with a fresh crown of new leaves which, flickering against the pale gold-tinted azure of the evening sky, seemed to bear witness to perpetual youth.

"I may have grown a little wiser with time," said Olivia, raising her eyes watchfully to his face as she spoke, "but I used to fancy that people who owned a place like this, people who had the right of walking under their own trees at any hour of the day or night they pleased, were so privileged and ought to be so happy! What do you think about it?"

"Well, they possess an element of happiness, there is no denying, though not an indispensable one by any means."

"Oh no!" said Olivia, "not indispensable, of course."

"No, for there is only one indispensable element of happiness in the world—only one to me, at least, and that—" With this he looked straight into Olivia's eyes, and said something which made her blush very much, but which, as it was supremely uninteresting to any body but themselves, need not be here reported. For some time they walked on, and Olivia was not able, or perhaps did not particularly try, to turn the conversation to more rational subjects.

But though she did not lose a word of what he was saying, she managed so to shape the direction of their walk that, emerging presently from the trees, they came to a pause in sight of a long range of gray stone building which, situated on the top of a gentle incline, seemed to dominate the rest of the park, and still glowed in the light of the setting sun.

"That is the house," said Olivia.

"Had we not better turn?" suggested Mr. Graham, who did not wish to leave the shelter of the friendly trees.

"Oh no! I should like you to look for a little while. We are doing no harm, I can assure you; the owner has been away from home for some time, and has not yet returned. Well, what do you think of it?"

"It is a very fine old house indeed."

"There is a little bit that dates back from the reign of Edward the Third—a very little bit, but still better than nothing. The place was almost entirely rebuilt at the end of the seventeenth century, and then there was an addition forty or fifty years ago. But I like to think of that little bit from the reign of Edward the Third; it has been so repaired and restored that I hardly know where to look for it, but wherever it may be it gives a sort of charm— Ah! you think me very foolish, I dare say."

"No I don't. I look on the place with more respect myself in consequence of it."

"You do? And the house is a very nice comfortable one inside—one of the most comfortable in the county, so at least every body says."

"I am sure it must be. It is about the finest old country-house I have ever seen."

"You really think so?" said Olivia, looking up with a slightly flushed face. She paused and looked down again, then asked in somewhat tremulous tones: "Do you think you would like to live in such a house as that?"

"I am afraid it is not much use to think about it."

"Well, but just make an effort of imagination for a minute. Suppose you lived in England, and suppose you were very rich, would you approve of that particular house as a home?"

"I could approve of no home without you, Olivia."

"Ah! but my company must be part of the supposition, of course; you must never leave me out of your calculations now. Well, under these circumstances would you approve of it?"

"Under these circumstances I should think it the very perfection of a home."

Again Olivia's face flushed, and for a moment she was mute with sheer happiness.

"Shall we go a little nearer?" she said presently, and began to move forward as she spoke.

Her arm was resting on that of her lover, and of course he moved forward too. But though he could not resist the gentle force that guided him in the direction of the house, though indeed he allowed himself to be thus guided for some way in silence, it was not the direction he would have chosen. He wanted to be alone with Olivia, and not in full view of the windows of a large country-house.

"Have we not gone far enough?" he asked at last, seeing that she still went on without any sign of coming to a halt. "I think you must be mistaken about the family being from home, you see the windows are all open."

"I suppose the owner's return is expected very soon, and they are getting things ready, but I am sure it has not taken place yet. Pray let us go on a little farther; I should like you to see as much as you can."

They went on accordingly—walking remorselessly across the smooth green turf which was evidently the pride of the gardener's heart, but Olivia said it did not signify—went on till they were only separated from the house by a narrow strip of flower-garden. Then Olivia said:

"I think we must go in and look at some of the rooms. I know the housekeeper quite well; there will not be the slightest difficulty. Really the place is well worth seeing, and there is a view from the drawing-room windows—"

"The view can be no better than what we see here for ourselves, and as for the rooms, I can imagine them. It is very kind of you, dearest, but I think—"

"Oh! but please do come, Harry. I really wish you to see."

Thus saying, she disengaged her arm, and set herself to undo the fastening of a little gate opening into the garden, which she forthwith entered. Mr. Graham of course had no choice but to follow.

She stepped briskly across the garden to a small glass-panelled door, the handle of which she turned without the ceremony of even a preliminary tap.

"The principal entrance is round at the other side, but we shall find this way the quietest. Come, Harry—no, you need not be afraid; I can assure you there is no danger of any body making the slightest objection."

Again he had no choice but to follow, and she led the way quickly through a succession of corridors till at last they found themselves in a spacious hall at the foot of what seemed to be the principal staircase. As they drew near they saw, crossing the hall towards the staircase, a spruce maid-servant.

"Oh, ma'am!" exclaimed the girl, starting as she caught sight of Olivia, and then she dropped a profound courtesy.

"Good-evening, Jane. You need not trouble yourself to wait—I am only showing the gentle-

man something of the house. There is no one in the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"No one, ma'am."

"Then this is the way, Mr. Graham."

And with these words Olivia went across the hall, and, throwing open a door, ushered her lover into a large and handsomely furnished room, with long windows looking on the flower-garden and park beyond.

"This is the drawing-room, Harry; how do you like it?"

"It is very splendid. Yes, indeed the house is well worth seeing, especially as you have been able to give me a sight of it with so little trouble. And this is the view you told me of?"

He went up to one of the windows. Olivia followed him, and for a while the two stood together looking at the prospect without. It was a beautiful prospect at all times—the downward-sloping sward, the groups of old trunks and wide-spreading branches, and a glimpse of open country showing itself at the end of a long vista formed by a break in the trees just opposite the house—more beautiful than ever as seen now in the quiet evening light, with the crimson flush of sunset still lingering on the horizon.

"I am glad you like the place," said Olivia, speaking for the first time after a long silence.

"Like the place! every body must like such a place as this."

Again Olivia was silent, then, looking on the floor, she remarked in rather a low husky voice:

"You have never asked me yet any thing about the owner."

"Have I not? I suppose because the only thing it concerned me to know about him was whether he was at home or not, and you have told me that already. Who is it, then?"

"I told you a little while ago that he was not at home," said Olivia, evading the question, and beginning to tremble violently, "because it was true then. But it would not be true now."

"Why, Olivia, what can you mean?"

She laid her hand gently on his shoulder, and, looking very intently on the floor, whispered:

"I mean, dear Harry, that you are the owner—you; for all that is yours is mine, and all that is mine is yours. Do you understand?"

She lifted her eyes timidly to his face. He was gazing at her with a look half startled, half perplexed, and she went on to explain, with eyes once more cast down:

"Yes, dear Harry, you chose me thinking I was poor and friendless, and oh! how proud and grateful you have made me by that choice no words of mine can ever tell. But I was not poor, Harry, though friendless enough, Heaven knows. This is Egerton Park, and Egerton Park was all mine, and now it shall be all yours; and this is the new owner's welcome."

And, with an instinctive endeavor to make him forget by greater deference that he was the receiver and she the giver, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips. As she did so, she found that it was cold as marble.

"Harry!" she cried in sudden alarm, "you are not angry with me, surely? I ought to have told you sooner, perhaps, but I took a childish pleasure in the idea of surprising you. Oh! why won't you speak to me? why do you look so strange?"

There was an expression of pain on his face

which she had never seen there before, nor even imagined possible.

"Are you angry with me, Harry?"

"Angry!" and his eyes rested on her with a look of such unutterable tenderness that she was relieved of all her worst fears forthwith. "But if I had known—if I had only known in time—"

"You would never have spoken to me—yes, I am sure of that. And I can never be thankful enough that you did not know in time—never, never."

She looked up with a smile half arch, half loving. But he did not smile back again, only gazed straight into space with the same expression of pain as before.

"Oh! Harry, do you care for me so little, then? I would have taken any thing from you, and never felt ashamed of it; is your love for me so much less?"

Again the look of tenderness came into his eyes, and she knew that his love was not in fault.

"Why should you grudge to be made rich by me, Harry?"

He hesitated for an instant as though bewildered, then answered stammering, while the blood rushed to his forehead:

"I—I have so little to give in return, you know."

"Ah! how proud you are! how proud, and how unkind! And you are going to give me a great deal—infinite treasures. You are going to give me your name—oh! you cruel Harry!" she expostulated, as he drew back with a shrinking movement which showed how little her arguments smiled with him.

He did not answer, and she went on:

"And you are going to give me your love—or, rather, you have given it me already—and surely you are not going to take it away again, and break my heart?"

He caught her in his arms, and covered her cheek with kisses.

"Ah, yes! you have my love! you have my love! and will have it while my life lasts."

"Then you are not going to give me up just because I am Miss Egerton of Egerton Park?" she asked as soon as she was released, trying to hide her blushes under an affectation of sportiveness.

"Give you up! I could not," he answered with passionate, almost defiant vehemence. "I could not."

"Why, then," said Olivia, "I love Egerton Park as I have never loved it yet. But mind, Harry, it is for your sake I love it so, not for its own. I would a thousand times sooner live and die with you in a log-hut in India or America, or where you pleased, than be left to live and die by myself here."

"You would!" he cried eagerly.

"To be sure I would. But to live and die with you in Egerton Park is best of all. Dear Egerton Park! I never thought to be so fond of it."

"Ah, yes! you like Egerton Park best, of course. To be sure, it is only natural that you should."

There was something in his voice which conveyed to Olivia's ear a slight suggestion of disappointment.

"Would you prefer that our home should be

in India?" she asked him. "Because if you have any real reason for wishing to live there rather than here—"

"I do not think I have—any real reason," he said slowly as she paused for a reply. "No," he added dreamily, almost as though he were answering his own thoughts, "there can be no reason except mere feeling."

"Ah yes! I see—the feeling of being so proud that you do not like to take the least little thing from me; but that is a reason I will not recognize for an instant. So you will be content with Egerton Park, won't you, Harry? You know you told me just now it looked the very perfection of a home. And I will try so hard to make you happy in it—ah! you can't think how hard I will try."

"My own dearest! And to make you as happy as you will make me shall be the business of my life."

The compact thus made was sealed as all lovers' compacts are, and then for some time they stood, hand locked in hand, and silently watched the crimson streaks fade on the horizon. The hearts of both were filled with gladness—the hearts of both, in spite of a certain shade of trouble by which Mr. Graham's brow was still clouded.

Presently Olivia remembered that there yet existed a disturbing element in her joy; and turned round to ask:

"You will be able to arrange every thing without going back to India, won't you, Harry?"

He shook his head sadly.

"It is impossible, my darling. My partners are depending on me for plans of a work for which they have already accepted a contract, and, now that I have seen my models, I must return without delay—I can not even put off my journey for another mail. My own love, don't look so vexed—the sooner I go, the sooner I shall return."

"And when will you return?" she asked in a voice half choked by disappointment.

He considered for a moment, and answered sorrowfully:

"It can not be for some months—perhaps not this year at all. I shall first have to see this new work put into train, and then wind up the partnership— But what I can do I will do, you know that."

"You will actually have to leave me in three days, Harry? And for such a long time too?"

"The time will pass quickly, little one, or at least it will seem to have passed quickly when it is over. And when it is over, when once I am with you again, I will be with you always, and we will never, never part more. Is not that a future worth looking forward to?"

She smiled through her tears, and acknowledged that it was. And then they began talking of that happy future, and of how they would spend it, until gradually the troubles of the present became all but blotted out of their remembrance. As they sat there in the gathering dusk, each listening to the sound of the other's voice, Olivia scarcely thought of the impending separation, and Mr. Graham nearly forgot that there was such a property as Egerton Park in the world.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MOSSMAN'S LAWYER.

AUSTIN's visit to the works at Chorcombe Lodge was a very short one that afternoon. He had a great deal to say to his wife and daughter, neither of whom he had yet had an opportunity of seeing except in the presence of strangers; and as soon as he judged that due time had been allowed for Mr. Graham and Olivia to have started on their walk, he took his way back to the Laurels.

He found the two ladies alone together in the library, whither Emmy had taken her mother to show her Mr. Tovey's designs for the future city of Waterston. Emmy was in great glee, expatiating on the splendor of the family prospects with a fluency which even for her was unwonted, but Mrs. Waters seemed to take it all very soberly; though, when she heard that the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate was definitively made, she did not fail to congratulate her husband on his acquisition.

It was long before this subject was any thing like exhausted, but at last it had been sufficiently discussed for Emmy to bethink herself that the time was ripe for hazarding a few remarks on Mr. Graham. The dryness of her father's answers, however, soon showed her that this was a topic on which he was not nearly so ready to be discursive as on the other.

"Well, papa, and what do you think of Miss Egerton's engagement? Was there ever any thing so romantic? That he should have taken her all the time for a governess—only fancy!"

"Ah, yes! very curious indeed."

"And so suddenly as it was made up too; I was never so surprised in my life as when mamma told me. After such a short acquaintance—why, it seems only yesterday that we saw him first. But you and mamma have known him for a long time, have you not?"

"Yes—some time, that is—oh yes!"

"But how strange it is, papa, isn't it, to think I never should have heard you speak of him before? And I am quite sure I never did."

"Did you not—ah! well—perhaps; people can't be always talking about every body they know. Let me see—plan No. 4"—here he fumbled among the papers on the table. "And so you found Nidbourne a very pretty place?"

This was evidently all that was to be got out of her father for the present; and after a few commonplaces about the beauties of Nidbourne, Emmy, not without a slight feeling of pique, went up stairs to superintend the unpacking of her boxes.

Emmy would have been more piqued still could she have known that the reticence which her father had shown on the subject of Mr. Graham in her presence was laid aside instantly on her departure. No sooner was he alone with his wife than he raised his eyes from his paper and said:

"And when he is married to Miss Egerton, I suppose he will live at Egerton House?"

"I suppose so—yes, it will be their principal home, of course," said Mrs. Waters placidly.

He bit his lip, and once more busied himself with his papers. Then again he looked up and said:

"Is it not a great pity?"

"What is a pity, Austin?"

"That he should be living in the neighborhood you know. Yes, upon my word, the more I think of it—so very inconvenient—I would not try to prevent it, Agnes; you must see something of what was going on; you had just taken a little pains to keep apart."

"Would you grudge him his happiness mere matter of convenience?" asked Mrs. Waters; and in her voice was a touch of bitterness very unusual with her.

"No, no; how you talk! only for his sake as well as ours it seems such a risk—Egerton House, of all places in the world! Oh! I know what you are going to say; he will be very full, of course, and so shall we, and after so many years I dare say it is quite ridiculous to be nervous. Only you must remember that it is not nobodies any more now, but, as I may say, the observed of all observers; and if he were to be in the least imprudent—"

"You need not be afraid," said Mrs. Waters, and the same touch of bitterness was still in her voice. "If he were inclined imprudent, you would have found it out long ago."

"True, very true. Oh yes! it is quite of me, of course—I know very well there is the slightest danger."

He relapsed into silence with the air of one convinced of his own mistake, and for some time there was nothing said on either side. Mrs. Waters spoke again, this time in the tones natural to her.

"You will pay him what you owe because he goes away again, won't you, dear?"

He shifted uneasily on his chair, and his face flushed a little.

"I don't know exactly—I think—Is it a great object with him to have the money immediately?"

"I don't suppose it is; at least he has said any thing about it. But I should like to have it, for all that, please, Austin; I can bear to think that there should be any delay."

"Yes, but if I pay him interest, it will be better for him to leave the money longer in my hands."

"Why should you not wish to pay it at once, dear?"

"Why? Oh! well, the fact is—" a color deepened yet more on his cheeks—the fact is, it would be more convenient to stand over a little. I have been spending a great deal of ready-money lately—the Beacon Bay estate, and so on."

Mrs. Waters turned pale with consternation.

"Oh! Austin, what do you mean? You have been spending so much that you actually can't afford—"

"Afford! do you talk as if I couldn't get a trumpany four hundred pounds? No, only that I don't want to spend more ready-money than I can help just at present—that's all."

"How much did the Beacon Bay estate cost you, Austin?" asked the wife anxiously.

"Not a penny more than it is worth, half so much either; so make your mind easy about that."

uch, Austin dear?" she repeated. you must know, forty thousand down, thousand remaining on mortgage. it is the greatest bargain that has his twenty years. But of course it ith me to save all the ready-money ler to get on with the building—the he soul of the whole thing, you see." thousand pounds is a great deal to Mrs. Waters nervously. "And what more say about it?"

re! what does it matter what an old dmore said?" not approve it, then?" pretended not to approve it rather—the property wasn't in his hands to and none of the agency commission ay. Sly old fox!—I know what he g of. Don't you let it bother you, railway is sure to be made, let him will; and the man is such a precious eclare I wish I was out of his hands Look at the mess he made of that Mossman—a pretty lawyer indeed; o more about law or business than a

fair with Mossman! Have you had ouble about that?"

o be sure, I didn't say any thing about ters, for I thought it was no good to and I wanted to forget it myself if I s, that fellow Mossman—let me see, is bill for the watch and chain before way, didn't he? ah! of course he did r that he set his lawyer to write to me his lawyer, by-the-way, and a sharp and threatened me with an action and w what. So I went to Podmore and what I was to do, and Podmore said fused to pay I should have to get you home from Nidbourne as witnesses, all sorts of trouble and expense, and ikely lose after all, for, as he admits e rascal Frisby is up to every thing, ther he seemed to advise me to give

say it was the best way, dear." est way—yes, very likely it was the ith an old slow-coach like Podmore matters; but it was rather hard to hing I didn't order just because I had lawyer. Not that I minded the monse, but I didn't relish knuckling down ackguard like Mossman." than going to law and losing, at any

well, that may be, but perhaps I haven't going to law yet. There's a talk e fellow bringing an action for slander e just because I told somebody he was infernal swindling scoundrel—and so he l, if you remember, Podmore himself said he was; but Podmore swears he d have said any thing of the sort. And e has got me into the scrape, he can g but shake his head and tell me I was ident; and I shouldn't wonder a bit if ond brings his action, and gets it too, understands what he is about, you may our mind to that. I often wish I had with instead of Podmore, that's all." Austin dear, you have nothing to re-

gret in that. You know he is not considered nearly so respectable as Mr. Podmore."

"Oh yes! I know all about that, and I dare say it's true too—very likely he is as great a scamp as his client. But if you get a scamp on your own side, mind you, it isn't always such a bad thing. Set a thief to catch a thief, eh? and I think in law they are pretty nearly all thieves together. I have reason to say so in this affair, at all events."

"I am very sorry you should have been worried so, Austin."

"Oh! the worry it has been you have no idea—just at this time, too, when I have so much to think of. Why, what with one thing and another, I have not had a minute to call my own since I saw you."

"I noticed you were looking rather tired, dear," said the wife, glancing at him with some solicitude. "But why should you have been doing so much when there was no need?"

"No need! It is very fine for you who have been enjoying yourself at the sea-side to say there was no need; but how do you suppose you would have found things looking, if there had not been somebody to think for you? Have I not had the carriage to order, and the servants to engage, and the liveries to choose, and—I declare I thought I never should have got through it all. And then the building at Chorcombe Lodge, and the upholsterer's estimate (for I am getting part of the furniture made to order), and the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and the plans of the town, and the proving of the will—enough to keep me at it day and night, I can tell you."

He took out his handkerchief and pressed it to his forehead with an air of weariness before resuming:

"Then to think how my time has been wasted with people calling and writing, and introducing other people—not that it has all been wasted time either, for I have picked up one or two very useful acquaintances that way. Of course one has to be very cautious whom one encourages, but when one sees that something is really to be made out of people— Now the other day I had a Mr. D'Almayne calling on me at the Brown Bear—a great connoisseur in art he is, and upon my word the conversation I had with him quite gave a new turn to my ideas. He says if I would only put myself in his hands he would undertake to make my house an attraction to all the lovers of art in the country."

"But you don't care much about that, do you, dear?"

"Oh! I don't want to be too ambitious at present, of course, but, as he says, any gentleman's house, to be a gentleman's house at all, must make some little show of art-treasures more or less; and really, if you could hear him speak, you would understand that it is by no means intrinsically such an expensive taste. But you shall see him and judge for yourself. He is to pass Chorcombe again next week on his way from a great sale of pictures at some nobleman's seat in Wales, and I have asked him to dine with us on Tuesday."

"To dine with us here, Austin?"

"Yes, certainly; so we must see and get a few friends together to meet him: I have asked Podmore and the Elkinses already. Now then who can this be?"

The visitors' bell had just sounded, and husband and wife both raised their eyes towards the window, wondering if their guest Mr. Graham could have already returned from his walk with Olivia. It was not, however, Mr. Graham whom they saw coming up the gravel-walk, but a spare lithe-looking man of middle age, dressed in slightly rusty black, with bilious complexion, lank wiry hair, and thin wedge-like features of very flexible conformation.

"I declare if that is not Frisby!" exclaimed Austin in astonishment.

"I wonder what he can want," said Mrs. Waters uneasily.

"Something about that affair of Mossman, no doubt. Well, I had better see him, I suppose."

The words had scarcely left his lips when one of the white-headed footmen entered to inform his master that a gentleman was waiting outside who particularly begged the favor of a minute's interview.

"You can show him in," said Austin, loftily.

And immediately the sallow face of Mr. Frisby showed itself in the doorway, composed into its most insinuating expression.

"If you will excuse the liberty, sir," said the visitor, advancing with an air of the profoundest respect, while a pair of shining black eyes were cast in rapid and admiring observation round the room. "I am aware that I ought to have sent in my card," he added, as the door closed, "but the fact was, I was afraid it might create a prejudice, and I was so very anxious to see you—"

"Oh! I had recognized you already from the window," interposed Austin with dignity.

"You had? Then, sir, I can only say how grateful I am to you for admitting me under the circumstances; but of course a gentleman can always distinguish between professional duty and personal feeling. I have called on business, sir, I need not say, or I never should have taken the liberty of presenting myself; but, before I go farther, perhaps Mrs. Waters will allow me to congratulate her on her return. I had the pleasure of witnessing Mrs. and Miss Waters's arrival from my office window this afternoon."

With this he made a very low bow to the lady of the house, who, though secretly rather afraid of him, could not do otherwise than bow in return.

"Pray take a chair, Mr. Frisby," politely said Austin, on whom a very favorable impression had been made by the notion of the lawyer rushing to the window and standing there, to the neglect of all other business, while the carriage containing Mrs. and Miss Waters passed by.

Mr. Frisby, with another very low bow, took a chair as he had been told, and then, clearing his throat, modestly began:

"When I say I have called on business, sir, you will naturally wonder that I have not addressed my communication to Mr. Podmore instead of intruding it upon you. So I ought to have done in strictness, no doubt, but the truth is, there was a personal explanation which I was very desirous of making. I don't often trouble the opposite side with personal explanations, but in a case where I feel so much respect as I do in the present, I can't be satisfied without it. You are aware, sir, that I am acting in the interests of Mr. Mossman?"

Austin winced and said he understood so.

"Mr. Mossman came to me in the way of

business, and placed himself in my hands, and naturally I am bound to do the best I can for him, just as I should have been bound to do the best I could for any body else who had come to me as a client—for you yourself, sir, supposing you had done me such an honor. I hope you quite see it?"

"Oh yes! quite," said Austin, with a slight sigh.

"Mr. Mossman conceived that you owed him a certain sum of money; and of course when he employed me it was my duty to take legal steps for pressing the claim, just as, supposing I had had the happiness of being in Mr. Podmore's place, it might have been my duty to take steps towards resisting it."

"Just so," said Austin, with another sigh. "But Podmore didn't resist, you know."

"And now that Mr. Mossman unfortunately conceives himself injured by certain words you have spoken affecting his reputation, it is of course my duty to support his claim under that head also, only entreating you to believe what a hardship I find it to have to act professionally against a gentleman I so much respect and admire. And I am sorry to say that is the business I have come about this evening, sir."

"What! is the man going to bring his action for slander, then?"

"If we can not succeed in arranging a compromise, there is no doubt about it, I am afraid, sir."

"I'll have none of your confounded compromises," cried Austin, angrily. "I've yielded once—and, let me tell you, it was Podmore's doing, and not mine, that I ever paid a penny—and I won't yield a step farther. Let him bring his action, and be damned to him!"

"That is as you wish, sir, altogether," said Mr. Frisby obsequiously. "But if you are going to resist now—and of course it is not for me to advise you one way or the other—but if you are, what a pity it is you gave way in the other matter!"

"Of course it was a pity, and I knew it at the time, and told Podmore so. But better do the right thing late than never."

"As a general rule, no doubt, sir; but I am afraid in the present case—A judge and jury would be sure to regard the act of payment as an acknowledgment on your part that Mr. Mossman's claim was just: and if it was just, the argument will be that you brought false and unwarrantable charges—"

"But the claim was not just, and I never will let it be said that it was—the most swindling, rascally—"

"Austin! Austin!" put in Mrs. Waters in dismay. But Mr. Frisby laid his hand on his heart.

"The privacy of this room is to me sacred," he declared with devout emphasis. "But to return to what we were saying; whether Mr. Mossman's claim was just or not, the great fact remains that it was paid, and that will be enough to raise a presumption of its justice in a jury's mind—you know how proverbial is the stupidity of juries, Mr. Waters—and in that case the plaintiff would be as sure of a verdict as any thing, and nobody could say what damages they might not clap on. There is no calculating the pig-headedness of a jury, really."

"Then what do you think I had better do?" asked Austin, who by this time had nearly forgotten that Mr. Frisby was on the other side, or, if he remembered the fact, resented it no longer.

"On that point it is not for me to advise, of course. But I have reason to believe that my client would be content with a very small sum offered by way of compromise, and I can not help thinking that to avoid the annoyance of a public trial and the risk of heavy damages, it would be worth your while—"

"How much do you suppose he would take, Mr. Frisby?"

The lawyer paused with an air of profound reflection, and then answered deliberately:

"I think I could undertake to compromise the case on the spot in consideration of your note of hand for fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!" said Austin, a little staggered.

"In the last action for defamation that I had to do with, the jury found a verdict for five hundred."

"Had you not better consult Mr. Podmore about it?" said Mrs. Waters, seeing her husband wavering.

"It is quite possible that Mr. Podmore may advise you differently," said Mr. Frisby, and from his manner it might have been thought that he was seconding Mrs. Waters's suggestion. "But if you are going to resist now, it is a terrible pity you did not resist before."

"Ah yes! that idiotic mistake of Podmore's! But he shan't bungle the business any more, that's one thing. I'll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, sit down and make out something for me to sign, and we'll get rid of this cursed nuisance out of hand."

"Well, sir, I really think it is the wisest course you could pursue under the circumstances, speaking quite impartially, you know," said Mr. Frisby with an air of great candor, drawing his seat nearer the table while Austin laid before him pen and paper.

Mrs. Waters said nothing. For her own part, she had a prejudice in favor of Mr. Podmore as a steady-going family lawyer, and something of a prejudice against Mr. Frisby; but then she knew too little of business not to distrust her own judgment. Besides, she had also a strong prejudice in favor of keeping out of law wherever and whenever it was possible, and did not like to make any further suggestion that might have the effect of delaying a settlement.

In a minute or two more Mr. Frisby had made a memorandum of the terms on which, as Mr. Mossman's legal adviser, he was willing that the affair should be arranged, and handed it to Austin to sign. This, after a careful reading and re-reading of the document, which gave him a high opinion of his own caution, Austin recently did, though not altogether with a good grace.

"That confounded Podmore!" he muttered as he laid down the pen. "Well, Mr. Frisby, here it is; but though it may be law, mind you, it isn't justice."

"Ah! sir, law and justice don't always go together, worse luck," said Mr. Frisby, casting his eye over the paper which Austin pushed towards him, and folding it up with visibly heightened spirits. "It isn't because a man has got

a good cause that he wins, or a bad cause that he loses; it is only just a matter of how the affair is managed for him. The glorious uncertainty of the law, sir, eh? But it's very shocking; seriously, it's very shocking."

"If you had managed my affair from the first I believe you would have won for me," said Austin emphatically.

"Oh, sir!" said Mr. Frisby, simpering.

"I believe you would. As you say, it was all that cursed blunder of Mr. Podmore's advising me to give in."

"Oh! sir, excuse me, I didn't quite say that. Though I won't deny that I have seen much weaker cases successfully defended."

"And what possessed Podmore not to defend mine, then?" asked Austin bitterly. "But I suppose he felt his own incompetency—that was it."

"Oh! Mr. Waters, you are really very severe on us poor men of law. No, you must let me stand up for Mr. Podmore, if you please, sir; he is a most respectable man, and for all matters of ordinary routine business thoroughly to be depended on. But he belongs to the old school—of course we all know that—and members of the old school are apt to strike us men of the world as rather slow and timid in their ideas, are they not, sir?"

"Oh yes! slow enough and timid enough in all conscience," said Austin surlily.

"There seems to be a want of go about them, if I may use the expression. Why, there is even Mr. Podmore—a first-rate man for all routine business as I have said—and yet I have actually heard that he goes about throwing cold water on this Beacon Bay scheme—quite one of the finest ideas of the age, you know, sir. And by-the-way, that reminds me you have something to do with it, I think?"

"I have bought the whole property," said Austin, unconsciously drawing himself up as he spoke.

"You have, sir!" said Mr. Frisby with well-affected surprise. "Allow me to offer you my heartiest congratulations. Why, then I suppose I have been misinformed as to Mr. Podmore's views, after all."

"No you have not; he tries to make out that they won't so much as get the railway."

"No, does he really though?—a thing that is as certain as daybreak to-morrow morning. Quite inconceivable, upon my word, how people can so blind themselves."

"Just what I say," rejoined Austin with a triumphant look at his wife. "But none so blind as those that won't see."

"I can't make it out at all," went on Mr. Frisby, pondering as though still lost in perplexity. "If it was any body else than Mr. Podmore, I should think—"

"What should you think?" asked Austin inquisitively, as the speaker suddenly interrupted himself.

"I was going to say that if it had been any body else than Mr. Podmore, I should think that he didn't want you to put your money in a good investment because he had a bad investment of his own to recommend—he! he! But that is impossible with a person of Mr. Podmore's respectability—quite out of the question. Though I won't say but what there are some lawyers

capable of it—ah! too many, I am afraid, Mr. Waters."

"I suppose there are," said Austin thoughtfully, for he was trying to remember if Mr. Podmore's arguments would bear any such construction.

"Ah! we are a bad lot, sir, a very bad lot. Don't believe a word we say, Mr. Waters, and then you're safe."

But this warning had only the effect of inspiring Austin with greater confidence in his new friend than ever.

"Ah! you may laugh, sir, but it is too true—only too true; we are not to be trusted an inch farther than you can see us—he! he! But dear me! it is getting quite dark; I am afraid I have been trespassing sadly on your valuable time."

And Mr. Frisby rose to go, not without an idea that he was leaving a very good impression behind him.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Frisby," said Austin patronizingly. "On the contrary, I am very glad to have had this conversation with you."

"You flatter me very much, sir. And I am sure if you only knew how gratified I am to have had this opportunity of paying my respects to you and Mrs. Waters—"

"Oh! but I quite hope this opportunity may not be the last," said Austin, even more graciously than before. He had a notion that it might possibly be worth while to reserve an opening for the future cultivation of Mr. Frisby's acquaintance.

"I'm sure, sir, how to thank you for your kindness I really don't know. And I hope I need not say that any commands which you may at any time have for me I shall always be proud to obey. Good-evening, sir. Mrs. Waters, I have the honor of wishing you a very good evening."

Austin bowed, and Mrs. Waters bowed; and Mr. Frisby, having made a lower bow than either, was about to pass out of the room when the master of the house rose and came after him.

"I will open the door for you, Mr. Frisby."

For somehow Austin felt reluctant to let his visitor go without making some further step towards securing his good-will. Who knew what bids might be made for that good-will, and from what quarter, before the occurrence of another opportunity such as the present?

"Oh sir!" exclaimed Mr. Frisby, in modest deprecation of so much honor.

But in spite of protest Austin persisted in accompanying him into the hall. Nor did his politeness stop even here.

"Let me see," he said, as soon as they were out of the room, "we are expecting a few friends to dinner next Tuesday. I wonder if you will join us—if you have no engagement, that is?"

"There are some occasions, Mr. Waters, on which all engagements give way," rejoined Mr. Frisby with almost reverential courtesy. "Next Tuesday did you say, sir?"

"Next Tuesday, at seven o'clock."

"I shall be only too happy to avail myself of the privilege," said Mr. Frisby solemnly.

Matters being thus arranged, Mr. Frisby bowed himself out, and started on his walk home in high good-humor, while Austin returned to the library in high good-humor also, and with a feeling of having made one of the shrewdest strokes

of diplomacy he had ever made in his life. yet, well pleased as he was with his evening's he was not in quite such a hurry as might have been expected to announce his triumph to his wife. The fact was, he knew that his wife did not understand much about business; and he had a stinctive suspicion that to any body understanding less about business than he did himself, the profound wisdom of his policy might not be so instantly apparent as it ought to be.

CHAPTER XIX.

COUSIN RANDAL AGAIN.

THREE days had passed, and Olivia sat in a pleasant morning-room opening on the flower-garden and sunlit lawn of Egerton Alone—that was nothing new, but it was thing new for her to feel quite so much alone as she did just now. For in that room a few minutes ago she had parted from her lover, and hitherto unknown rapture which she had in his companionship made solitude seem solitary than ever it had done before. She cast her eyes round, looking at the chair on which he had sat, the writing-table on which his arm rested, the paper-weight he had unconsciously made precious by trifling with, the spot where he had stood to bid her farewell, the doorway through which she had seen him pass, she felt her heart grow dim, and asked herself with a kind of sternation how she should get through the next day which must elapse before she could see him through that doorway again.

And yet in the midst of her pain she was happy—happy with a happiness of which that was the best measure. It was because she knew that she missed him so; because she knew that he loved her, and that she loved him, and knew that she was made free to love him without stint, loved him with her whole heart and soul, loved him so that sometimes she was almost fain to stifle herself for her own feelings. But if she over her feelings occasionally, she was ashamed of them; she could not be ashamed bestowing all that she had of love on him of whom she was so proud, to whom she was so grateful—how could she fail to be grateful to the man who, supposing her to be poor and dependent, had singled her out from all the world to be his wife, who had given her that which she had believed she never could expect—the delight of knowing herself to be loved for her own sake? As she thought of all that had been done for her, comparing her present self with her poor useless vacant thing she had been, she looked up brightly through her tears, and acknowledged that, in spite of temporary separation she was supremely blest.

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Randal Egerton has been called. I said I didn't know if you were at home, ma'am."

Olivia brushed her tears hastily away.

"Mr. Randal Egerton! Oh! show him in by all means."

She had never been less in the mood for receiving visitors, but her happiness made her so completely disposed towards all the world, and so completely that she could not think of sending from her door

his cousin and her father's nephew. So when the visitor was ushered in, she went forward with extended hand to meet him, feeling more amicably inclined towards him than perhaps she had ever felt before, but still with a certain mechanical dreaminess in her manner which, had the young man observed it, he would hardly have deemed complimentary. He did not observe it, however, and, striding forward with eager gait, took the proffered hand and raised it to his lips.

"Welcome back to Somerset, fair cousin."

"Thank you, Randal," said Olivia cordially, for it seemed to her for a moment that he was congratulating her on something besides her return home—and she allowed him to retain her hand a little longer than usual. "You are all so well, I hope?" she asked presently, with a sudden recollection of the proprieties of the occasion.

"Quite well—well enough, considering the illness you have condemned us to, at least. Why, Olivia, we thought you were never coming home."

"Did you? Still I have not been so very long away. Won't you sit down, Randal?—here is a chair," she added quickly, for she thought he was about to step towards the seat which Mr. Graham had occupied that same morning.

"It did not seem long to you, perhaps, but it did to us," he answered politely, as with much satisfaction he took the chair which Olivia had pointed out, almost close to her own. "And how long have you been back?"

"I returned three days ago. It was very kind of you to think of coming to see me so soon."

"Oh! that's nothing—I would have been over a great deal sooner, but I have been up in town for the last week, and only got home yesterday. I did not even know that you were back till I inquired at the lodge just now, but I could not wait a day at home without coming over on the chance of seeing you."

"It was very kind of you," reiterated Olivia.

He was quite surprised to find her so gracious, and determined to make the most of his opportunity.

"Kind! Oh! well, I can't say any thing about that. There is no merit in doing what you can't help, you know."

And he heaved a deep sigh.

Olivia had been so much engrossed with her own feelings and her own ideas that she did not quite understand what he meant, and looked at him with surprised inquiry. Her glance was met by another so tender that it roused her from her waking trance more effectually than any thing that had gone before, at the same time that it cast an abrupt chill on the friendliness with which she had been disposed to regard her visitor. Was he actually going to begin that wearisome tale of mock love over again? He had heard nothing of her real love, then? To be sure, this was the first time that he had been in the neighborhood of Egerton Park since her engagement had been made known.

"Ah! Olivia, you pretend not to understand, but it is only pretense. You understand that I love you, you understand—"

"Mr. Egerton!" said Olivia sternly. It seemed a kind of profanation that Randal Egerton should sit there speaking to her of love in that

room where Harry Graham had spoken to her of love so short a while before.

"Olivia!" he cried in distracted accents. But all cousinly kindness was thoroughly chilled in her heart now, and she went on without compunction:

"I see you have not heard of what has happened since we met last, Randal."

"Of what has happened—why, what has happened?" he asked, looking at her in surprise. He noticed now that there was something unusual about her, that there had been something unusual about her all the time they had been talking; but it was beyond his skill to discover what that something was, still more to form any theory as to its cause.

"Randal, you must congratulate me on being very happy," she said, with a sudden influx of the universal philanthropy in which even Randal Egerton was included. "I am engaged."

He stared as though hardly understanding the meaning of the words.

"Engaged! Engaged to be married, do you mean?"

"Yes, engaged to be married."

He was silent—stunned by a blow the most disagreeable that he had ever experienced. Olivia going to be married—the broad acres of the family estate, which he had never been able to regard without something of an owner's interest, about to be transferred to an utter stranger, and, so far as he and his were concerned, blotted out of existence! And if the sense of loss and disappointment was strong, stronger yet was the sense of personal mortification and defeat. He had laid deliberate siege to Olivia's heart, and failed, and had not only failed, but had been beaten in the competition by another beyond doubt infinitely his inferior. He, Randal Egerton, had condescended to avow a preference for a woman who had been a governess, who was not a beauty, and who was some months older than himself—he had even condescended to feel something like a preference for her—and this was his reward! Heavens and earth! As he thought of it all, the very room seemed to spin round with him.

"You are very much surprised, I think," he heard Olivia say at last.

He stirred himself up, and prepared to play his part. It would not do to make her think that he was regretting her property, and, strange to say, he was yet more jealous of letting her suspect what modicum of sincerity there might have been in his past professions of tenderness.

"I am very much surprised, yes," he answered smiling. "You have so often said you were going to be an old maid that upon my word I was beginning to believe you. And then so cool-headed and sensible as you have always shown yourself—"

"And you think that now I am showing myself hot-headed and foolish, you mean? Well, we will not argue about that. But are you not going to congratulate me?"

"I will congratulate you, Olivia," he replied, with the mild gravity of an elder brother appealed to by an impassioned younger sister, "when, as your near relation, I am satisfied that your choice has fallen on one worthy of you, and worthy of recognition by your family. What is he, and what is his name?"

"His name is Henry Graham," said Olivia haughtily; "and he is so exactly what I wish him to be that I would not have any thing about him changed for the world. I am satisfied, and that may be enough for those connected with me."

"Graham—Graham. Of what family?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Not of large property, then?"

"Not of large property that I know of. But it seems to me that these are questions entirely unwarranted on your part."

"Excuse me, my dear cousin, but I can not think so. You are the heir of an old and honored family—I am your near relation—and surely I have a right to satisfy myself if I can that you are not throwing yourself away on some heedless adventurer who is thinking of nothing but your money. And certainly, with your strong sense, you must understand that when a woman situated as you are receives professions of love from a man of no property, the presumption is—"

"I know what the presumption is," interrupted Olivia, drawing herself up with a glowing pride in herself and her betrothed such as she had never yet felt, for she was thinking how different the reality was from what her cousin imagined, and imagined not unnaturally. "But perhaps your kind concern may be allayed when you hear that I was engaged to Mr. Graham before he knew that there was such a place as Egerton Park in existence. He asked me to marry him supposing me to be neither more nor less than Miss Waters's governess."

But somehow the announcement which she felt such glory in making did not appear to impress Randal as she had expected. He looked surprised indeed; but his surprise was expressed in a shrug of the shoulders, as though it were excited rather by something in herself than by what she had said.

"My dear Olivia! And do you mean to say you actually believe that?"

Olivia's lip curled with measureless scorn.

"You can not believe it, I dare say," she answered. She remained sitting for a moment, her lip curling still as she thought of the pitiful shallowness of nature that could not even comprehend the magnanimity which in Henry Graham seemed a mere matter of course; then she rose with the stateliness of an empress.

"Mr. Egerton, I will wish you good-morning. Another time, when you are able to speak without insulting me, I shall be happy to see you."

And ere he could reply, she swept from the room with an air of offended dignity which he had never even imagined in her.

The surprise of her abrupt departure, coming so soon after that other surprise of finding her and her fortune about to pass out of his reach for evermore, was fairly overpowering, and for some time he sat where she had left him, pondering over his disappointment and his wrongs. For though his self-love had enabled him to bear the wound with comparative equanimity while Olivia was present, the wound had been a very deep one for all that, and the more he probed it the deeper he found it.

But it was no good to sit brooding there all morning, so at last he rose, and, with a bitter look round at the smiling stretches of turf and *shady woods* in which he could no longer feel a *proprietary interest*, he strode out of the room and

the house, and went round to the stables. Then addressing with a smiling face the first servant met, he gave directions for his horse to be ready and brought down to the entrance of the park, whither he would make his own way on foot—because he preferred to walk, he said; reality because he could not endure to hang about in view of gossiping grooms and stable-boys.

He set out on his walk in a sufficiently unenviable frame of mind, passing by with downcast eye the prettiest bits of landscape, and occasional muttering the name of Graham between his teeth. Probably by reason of this preoccupation, he suddenly found himself, before he was aware of it, within a few feet of a female figure sitting under shelter of a large parasol on a rustic bench beside the path. He was not in the mood for caring to appear polite, and was about to turn another way when a movement of the parasol showed him fair, fat, flaxen-ringleted face which he at once recognized as that of Olivia's elderly lady-companion, Mrs. Waddilove. He had not hitherto been disposed to be specially civil to Mrs. Waddilove, whom indeed he had been apt to regard as a decided bore; but to-day he had no soon caught sight of her than he advanced, bowing as smiling as though she had been the most valuable of his friends.

"Ah! Mrs. Waddilove, how do you do? Enjoying the beauties of nature, I see?"

And he actually went up and gave her his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" said Mrs. Waddilove respectfully, thinking to herself the while what a very nice young man he was. "Yes; it is very pleasant here, is it not? I have been away visiting my friends while Miss Egerton was in Dorsetshire, and upon my word I find it quite delightful to be back again."

"Ah yes! I dare say. And so"—here he took care to smile more than ever—"so it seems there have been important changes in progress during your absence. My cousin going to be married—who could possibly have thought it?"

He had done his best to persuade her to be married for some years past, but now it pleased him to speak as though in the mere notion of her marriage there were some strange incongruity.

"Well, it was very unexpected, was it not, sir?"

"Unexpected!—the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of, upon my honor. And then the air of romance there seems to be about it, on her part at least, poor thing—that's the queerest bit of it all. Why, if she had been a girl of seventeen instead of what she is, she could have been more in love, positively."

He was aware, or might have been aware he had thought about it, that his own form designs on his cousin must have been perfectly well known to Mrs. Waddilove, and yet he could not deny himself the pleasure of this dig.

"It is very strange, sir, certainly," said Mrs. Waddilove, who, as a companion about to be superseded, was no better pleased with Olivia's engagement than Randal himself. "But she seems to be very happy, and that is the principal thing, of course."

"Oh! of course, and if I could only be certain that it would last, I could wish nothing better, I need not say. But so much depend

on how this Mr. Graham may turn out— Can you tell me any thing about him?"

"He seems a very nice gentleman, sir, but nothing so wonderfully out of the way either. He is very clever and all that, I dare say, but I don't know that I should call him particularly good-looking myself."

And as Mrs. Waddilove spoke, she could not help marvelling at Miss Egerton's taste in preferring a bronzed weather-beaten man of middle age like Mr. Graham to the handsome cavalier who even then stood before her, and whom the good lady knew that in her own younger days she could not possibly have resisted.

"Ah! I understand—as ugly as sin," muttered Randal with a caress of his silken beard. "But what I rather meant was—who is he, what is he, where does he come from, how did she get to know him? These are not questions I can exactly put to my cousin, of course, and yet as her relative you will see that I must be anxious—"

"It is very kind of you, I am sure, sir, and I wish there was more that I could tell you, but I only came back yesterday, you must remember. He seems to have been a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Waters, by what I can make out, and went down to visit Mrs. Waters and her daughter at Nidbourne. I don't suppose Miss Egerton ever saw him till then; indeed, now that I think of it, I am sure she never did, for she told me herself that this is his first visit home from India for nearly twenty years."

"India! Not a military man, is he?"

"Oh no! sir."

"In some rascally business, then. And do you mean to say she knows nothing of him except through the Waterses?"

"I think that was the only introduction."

"And they have not had him under their eyes for twenty years, it seems. Why then, for aught she knows, he may be a regular swindler and blackleg, with a wife and a dozen children, perhaps. This ought to be looked into, Mrs. Waddilove."

"Certainly it ought, sir," said Mrs. Waddilove, almost frozen with virtuous horror at Randal's last suggestion. "And I'm sure how thankful she ought to be to think what a kind friend and adviser—"

"Oh! well, I do what I can, but it is very difficult to befriend and advise some people," said Randal, his brow darkening as he thought of how Olivia had taken his display of interest in her affairs. "And where is this Mr. Graham to be found, supposing that for my cousin's sake I thought it right to take any steps?"

"He has been staying at the Laurels—Mr. Waters's new place, you know. But I am pretty sure he must have started by this time: it is more than an hour since he was here to say good-bye to Miss Egerton, and he would naturally be with her up to the last minute he could, with such a long separation to look forward to."

"Separation! Where is he going, then?"

"Back to India, sir, did you not know? He is obliged to return to wind up his affairs, and will be several months gone."

"Several months!" Randal's brow became perceptibly clearer. *Who knew what several months might bring forth? He could not now*

regard the game as quite up, and was tempted to regret that he had taken such trouble to conceal from Olivia the pang which her news had cost him.

"I am very much obliged for your information, Mrs. Waddilove. And now if you will excuse me—my horse is waiting down at the gate. Good-bye; I am very glad indeed to have had the pleasure of seeing you."

And then, with a friendly pressure of the hand, given in the same spirit with which he might have tipped her a sovereign had she been a little lower than she was in the social scale, he turned away, and walked gloomily towards the gate, where, as gloomily, he mounted his horse and rode off. The game was not quite up, perhaps, but he had enough to be gloomy about, in all conscience. It was hardly likely that, with a rival to contend against, he should do in months what he had failed to do in years when there was no rival in the case. Unless indeed he could succeed in discovering something to that rival's discredit—and the man who had made love to an heiress under pretence that he knew nothing about her money was sure to be a discreditable character in one way or another. But then supposing him to be the greatest villain unhanged (as he very likely was), how was the fact to be proved?

In this desponding mood Randal rode on, until at last a new turn was given to his thoughts by a glimpse which he caught of the words "The Laurels" inscribed in neat white letters on a large freshly-painted gate.

"The Laurels—that's where he is, confound him, or has been, at least."

He cast a resentful look at the spruce white house visible through the clustering lilac and laburnum trees that overhung the wall. As he looked, a new idea seemed to occur to him, for he all at once became very meditative.

"I wonder if I could do any good by calling in there some day and asking a few questions," he was thinking.

He considered a little, and found the notion feasible enough.

"I am sufficiently introduced to call, if I like, without making them think there is any thing under it. I have seen the girl at Olivia's often enough, and the mother too once or twice. And, by-the-way, she wasn't a bad-looking girl either if she had been properly dressed. She is the only one, I think."

He looked over his shoulder at the house, no longer resentfully, yet with evident interest.

"She'll have enough to dress on now, at any rate. Two hundred thousand pounds, I think it was—why, Olivia herself doesn't much more than beat that. Ah! but then it isn't the girl's—it is the father's. And if the father is going to lock it up in the Beacon Bay estate, as they said he was when I was here last, and the railway perhaps never to be made at all—"

He shook his head slowly, and relapsed into thought too vague to shape itself into words, even though unspoken ones. Presently he roused himself, and yet again looked back at the house.

"Well, well, I can call in a day or two, at all events. It can do no harm to take a look, and who knows but that at the same time I may find out something? They will be more likely to know than Mrs. Waddilove, anyhow."

CHAPTER XX.

EMMY WAS RIGHT.

EMMY was not altogether sorry when Mr. Graham went away. Not that she had any personal objection to his society, but it served to keep up in her mind a disagreeable suspicion which she had never yet had the courage to put an end to by a straightforward question, partly because she was afraid of offending her father and mother by an unworthy doubt, partly perhaps because she half unconsciously feared to find that doubt confirmed. It was rather a relief to her, therefore, when the departure of the guest allowed her to drop him and the misgivings connected with him out of her thoughts, as she speedily did amid the distractions of new dresses, new friends, new amusements, and new surroundings. In two or three days she had ceased to trouble her head about Mr. Graham one way or another, except that she sometimes wondered how she had come to be so suspicious of him.

She was sitting with her mother one afternoon in the pretty drawing-room at the Laurels, with her work on her lap—no unsightly undergarment to be hemmed or stitched or darned, be it remembered, but some tangle of silk and beads entirely free from any taint of utility—when a loud peal was heard at the visitors' bell. The drawing-room was at the back of the house, where no view of a new-comer was to be commanded; but visitors were so much a matter of course now that Emmy did not allow herself to be flurried by the uncertainty, and calmly awaited the event with no symptom of interest beyond a smoothing out of the folds of her silk dress.

A servant entered and presented her mother with a card, which Mrs. Waters had only just had time to glance at when the visitor himself appeared in the doorway—a tall, handsome young man with dark hair and eyes, whom Emmy, looking up with some curiosity, recognized at once as Mr. Randal Egerton. And no sooner had she recognized him than she straightway lost some of her composure. The visitors to whom she had lately become accustomed had all been of commonplace humdrum type—Podmores and Elkinsons and Toveys and the like—people whom it was gratifying to be acquainted with on equal terms, but whom even in her poorest days Emmy had never exactly regarded as being fashioned of clay different from her own. But Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, a leading member of the county aristocracy, the only member of the county aristocracy she had ever come across except Olivia (and Olivia was so forgetful of her greatness that others were apt to forget it too), him she had always looked up to as belonging to a world in which she had no part—a world of rank and fashion, of Lady Ediths and Lady Beatrices, of gilded saloons and gay assemblies, of West-End clubs and Bond Street shops, of grand stands and betting-books, of opera-couliesses and *rouge-et-noir* at Baden-Baden, of every thing, in fine, that was bright, delightful, wicked, and unattainable. No wonder then that, when she saw so distinguished a personage enter her mother's drawing-room, Emmy should feel mingled with her awe a touch of excitement and elation.

"Mrs. Waters!" he said—advancing, as Emmy remarked to herself, with exquisite grace

—"how do you do? I have had the pleasure of seeing you a few times at my cousin Olivia's, but I am afraid you have almost forgotten me."

"Oh dear no! I remember you quite well," said Mrs. Waters cordially, scarcely appreciating, however, the full force of this delicate flattery. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Egerton."

"You are exceedingly kind. The fact is, I found myself riding in this direction, and, hearing that you lived here, could not deny myself the pleasure of looking in to pay my respects to you and Miss Waters. Miss Waters, will you allow me?"

He picked up a skein of silk which Emmy in her confusion had let fall, and presented it to her with an easy yet respectful elegance of manner such as she had never before been approached with. She blushed and stammered out what she feared was a very awkward acknowledgment of the courtesy; and then all three seated themselves, Emmy smoothing out anew the folds of her dress—there was something in the sound of the rustling silk which she found surprisingly reassuring. When she had got a little settled, she could not help thinking for a moment of John Thwaites, and wondering what he would say if he knew what a guest she and her mother were receiving.

"You and Miss Waters have just been making a stay in Dorsetshire, I believe?" she heard Mr. Egerton say.

"Yes," replied her mother—"at a little place called Nidbourne."

"Ah yes! I think I have heard the name—it is a very pretty part of the county, I imagine."

Here Emmy, taking for granted that the stranger's attention was by this time completely diverted from herself, ventured to peep up in his direction, when, to her consternation, their eyes met. She was considerably put out by this little incident, but he did not lose an atom of his graceful self-possession—(how different from John Thwaites!).

"You liked the place, Miss Waters, I need not ask; you looked quite approvingly at the mention of its name."

"I liked it very much, thank you," murmured Emmy. "It is a very quiet pleasant little spot."

"I should have thought almost too quiet for a young lady. Do you like country better than town, then?"

"I hardly know," said Emmy, overwhelmed with shame at having to make the confession.

"I—I have never been in London."

"Never been in London!" he exclaimed; but his surprise was so entirely free from all flavor of superciliousness that Emmy felt it to be complimentary rather than otherwise.

"We should have gone this summer, I think she said, striving to lessen the reproach of her inexperience as far as she could, "only papa has so much to do just at present that it is impossible for him to leave home."

"Mr. Waters is quite well, I hope?" Randal asked, with a polite look towards the lady of the house.

"Quite well, thank you," said Mrs. Waters. "He is over at Beacon Bay on business to-day or I am sure he would have been most happy to see you."

"You are very good to say so. Beacon Bay—I fancy Mr. Waters will have business at Be-

con Bay for a long time to come, if what I hear is true, at least."

He accompanied the words with so manifest an expression of inquiry that Mrs. Waters felt herself compelled to answer:

"It is quite true. My husband has bought the estate."

"The whole of it? A very fine property, to be sure."

"Yes, the whole of it," said Mrs. Waters, with an almost imperceptible sigh.

"Indeed!" said Randal. "I have to offer him my best congratulations."

There was a pause, during which Emmy, with some dismay at her own audacity, caught herself stealing another look in the direction of the visitor. But this time their eyes did not meet, the young man's being turned towards the floor in apparent contemplation. The truth was, he was considering how he might best turn the conversation to another topic on which he also wished for information.

"I had the pleasure the other day of hearing news that interested me very much," he said at last. "My cousin Olivia's engagement—you have known it from the beginning, I believe."

By this time he had had full leisure to decide upon his own attitude towards the fact which at first hearing had startled him so disagreeably, and, as will be seen, had considerably modified his original manner of treating it.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waters, "it was settled while she was with us at Nidbourne. I hope she will be very happy—indeed I may say that I am sure of it."

"Most sincerely do I trust so," said Randal fervently. "I have only one regret connected with the subject, and that is, that I had not the pleasure of making Mr. Graham's acquaintance before he left for India. I confess I should like to have seen something of the man on whom my cousin's future happiness depends."

"So far as it depends on him I think I can undertake to answer for it," said Mrs. Waters warmly.

"I am so glad to hear you say so," was the delighted reply. "Ah yes! to be sure, I remember hearing that he was a friend of yours. And might I ask if you have known him long?"

Emmy listened very attentively.

"Yes, a great many years—both Mr. Waters and I."

"You can hardly imagine the satisfaction you are affording me, Mrs. Waters. I wonder if I might further ask whether you know any thing of his family and connections? You will not find fault with me for my questions, I know; you must remember that I and my family are the only relations my poor cousin has in the world, and I feel it incumbent on me to make these inquiries on her behalf just as, under like circumstances, you might make similar inquiries on behalf of any one closely connected with you."

With these words he directed a glance towards Emmy, who blushed, and gave one or two little adjusting taps to her dress which made it rustle more than ever. But presently she heard her mother's voice sound in reply, and the rustle was hushed instantaneously.

"I have known his family all my life long. It was considered one of the most respectable in

—," and here Mrs. Waters mentioned the name of the town which had been her own native place.

Emmy's blushes had all disappeared now, forcibly driven away by the excitement of this new discovery. So it was definitely established that Mr. Graham had actually come from the place where her mother had come from—where her uncle Harold also had come from, that was to say. Not that the fact proved any thing in itself, of course, but then why had it never hitherto been mentioned in her presence? She looked up suspiciously. Mrs. Waters was externally calm enough to deceive the eyes of any one not intimately acquainted with her, but the unwonted flush on her cheeks sufficed to convince Emmy that she was laboring under some unusual excitement.

"I can hardly express the relief that this has been to my feelings," said Randal sweetly, but with a certain blankness of look which might have stood as well for disappointment as satisfaction. "So that for Mr. Graham's earlier antecedents you yourself can vouch by personal knowledge, and since then—"

"Since then all who know him in India will tell you that he has been respected and looked up to by every body who has had to do with him," said Mrs. Waters, with something in her manner that seemed almost like pride. "He belongs to the firm of Barret, Phillips and Graham in Bombay, and if you like to inquire—"

"Your assurance is more than sufficient," interrupted Randal chivalrously. "You have not, then, lost sight of him during any part of the time—I mean that a correspondence of some sort has always been kept up?"

"Yes, always."

Another fact for Emmy! Again the fact was one not counting for much in itself; but when it was considered how secretly the correspondence must have been carried on, how Emmy herself had never so much as seen the outside of a letter either directed to India or coming thence—as she thought of it all, suspicion crystallized within her mind into something like certainty, and she became so strongly excited on the subject as to be impatient of every thing that delayed the full explanation on which she was now bent—impatient even of the presence of the brilliant stranger. She was quite relieved, therefore, when, with the courtly grace which seemed so natural to him, he rose to take leave.

"Mrs. Waters, I never can thank you enough for the satisfaction you have given me," he said, in the same sweet voice as before. "I will not intrude longer to-day, but perhaps at some future time you will allow me the honor of repeating a visit which has afforded me so much pleasure."

Of course Mrs. Waters said she would be very happy to see him, and then he shook hands very cordially, first with her and next with Emmy, to whom he bowed with an air of respectful homage which, under ordinary circumstances, would have sent her into a flutter for another half-hour to come. But as it was, she was too impatient to be alone with her mother to think of any thing else.

She was alone with her mother at last, but as she began to think how she should set about what she had to say, she got so nervous that for a minute or two she was unable to say any thing

at all. It was Mrs. Waters, therefore, who spoke first, wondering perhaps at her daughter's unaccustomed silence, and not unwilling to find out its cause.

"Well, Emmy, are you thinking what a polite visitor we have had?"

"He was very polite certainly," agreed Emmy, but she scarcely bestowed a thought on him as she spoke. "How anxious he was to find out something about Mr. Graham!" she added a little tremulously.

Her mother's color had subsided, but Emmy noticed that it rose again at this.

"He wanted his cousin for himself, and he is jealous that she is going to marry somebody else," was Mrs. Waters's somewhat harshly given explanation.

"Oh! mamma, it did not seem to me that he was jealous a bit—indeed I think it must have been all a mistake about his ever caring for her in that way. But he is naturally anxious to know something about the person she is going to marry, and really for my part I think he is quite right. To tell you the truth, I have sometimes wondered myself who Mr. Graham can be."

Emmy's heart beat fast as she uttered the last words, and she bent very close over her work while she waited for her mother's answer.

She waited, but no answer came. Emmy understood that now or never was the time for a decisive question, and, bending over her work closer still, she subjoined, in a voice scarcely audible through her trepidation:

"Do you know, mamma, I have sometimes thought he might have something to do with Uncle Harold?"

And then, the die being cast, she ventured to give a glance upward just to see the effect.

Her mother, evidently in the extreme of agitation, was sitting with drooping head, and face covered by both hands.

"Mamma!" cried Emmy, startled in spite of all her previous suspicions. "It is true, then?"

Mrs. Waters raised her face slowly and turned it towards her daughter. It was pale as ashes.

"Emmy, promise you will never tell any living soul—promise, as you love your mother."

But Emmy was so overwhelmed by her own conflicting emotions that she hardly noticed the appeal. She was at once surprised, mortified, ashamed, and angry—surprised at the discovery she had made, notwithstanding that she had been half prepared for it—mortified at the ignorance in which she had been kept so long—ashamed of the disgrace of contact with the felon-uncle whose name she had always held in horror—above all, angry that she should have been exposed to such disgrace. And the idea, too, of expecting her to keep the man's secret for him!

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed reproachfully, half crying as she thought of her grievances, "how could you do such a thing—how could you? To let him come here, after all he has done—such a dreadful person—talking to us and living with us just like one of ourselves—and poor Miss Egerton! actually to think you would let her engage herself to him, and never say a word to put her on her guard. Oh! how could you?"

"Emmy, do you want to break my heart? Promise me you will never tell."

"I don't know whether it is right to promise," *whispered Emmy.* "Poor dear Miss Egerton—

it seems right-down wicked to let her marry such a person without warning her. Oh, mamma, how could you? I really did think you cared for her."

"I do care for her, Emmy, and it is because I care for her that I am glad and rejoiced to see her marry my brother, for I know he loves her, and will make her happy. He did not want her for her money—you know yourself that he did not; he asked her to be his wife believing that she had not a penny in the world, and he is a rich man now, you must remember. If she had been poor as he thought, you would have seen that it was cruel to part them, and is he to suffer just because she happens to have a few wretched acres of land that he had never heard of? And I can tell you, Emmy, that if he had heard of them he would sooner have cut off his right hand than ask her—he is my brother, and I know what he is made of."

The concluding words were spoken with an air of passionate pride which Emmy thought rather inappropriate to the subject. Still, exaggerated as the tone of her mother's championship seemed, she could not help understanding that in spite of his past faults her uncle did most truly and sincerely love Miss Egerton, and would in all human probability make her happier than any one else could do. So, reflecting thus, Emmy began to relent a little.

"What does papa say?" she inquired. It was natural that her mother should be unduly lenient under the circumstances; but she felt that, if her father had brought himself to forgive the man who in requital of his benefactions had drawn shame and well-nigh ruin on his head, the fact would weigh for a good deal with her. "He knows who Mr. Graham is, I suppose?"

"He knows—oh yes!" answered her mother in low even tones.

"And he has forgiven him, then?"

Mrs. Waters's lip quivered as though under the influence of some strong emotion, but with an evident effort at calmness she brought herself to say steadily:

"He has even accepted favors from him, Emmy. If it had not been for the little sums your uncle Harold has lent us from time to time, I hardly know what we should have done to live; they make up nearly four hundred pounds now."

Emmy looked very much shocked.

"Oh! mamma, you actually mean to say papa has laid himself under obligations—"

"Poverty does strange things sometimes," said Mrs. Waters with a faint smile. "And people are very poor who have to live like gentlemen and ladies on a hundred a year."

"Oh yes! I know, but still— It seems such a degradation to have taken favors from a person like that—a person who has done such a base, wicked thing, and brought such horrible shame on every body connected with him. I wonder how papa could have forgiven him so far, that I do."

"Oh, Emmy!" broke out Mrs. Waters almost with a cry, "how hard you are! how hard! God forgive you, my poor child! you don't know what you are doing."

"I did not mean to be hard, mamma," said Emmy, again relenting a little at sight of her mother's distress. "But one must be just, you see, and poor Miss Egerton—"

"Be just to your uncle, then, who has sacrificed himself to you ever since you were born," said Mrs. Waters impetuously, then more tranquilly she added: "For I am sure he has sometimes sent us money, Emmy, when he wanted it almost as much himself. It is only lately that he has been rich, you know, since he was taken into partnership; but through all the years that he was only a poor struggling clerk he never forgot that we were struggling too. Oh! Emmy, he has been very, very generous; can you not be a little like him?"

Emmy was touched—touched not only by her mother's entreaty and recital of her uncle's benefits, but also by her recollection of the traits of goodness which she herself had seen in him. In particular, she thought of the day when she had beheld him risk his life for that of a poor fisherman, and could not but admit to herself that he might deserve something better than the utter reprobation which she had been disposed to award him.

"Of course I suppose it is possible for a man to do a very wicked thing once in his life without being altogether wicked in himself," she said meditatively.

"Thank God, yes," said Mrs. Waters, more earnestly than her daughter had ever heard her speak before. "Oh! my darling, how can you doubt it? And remember it is not only by the measure of our sin that we are judged, but by the measure of our temptation."

"Yes, and of our repentance," added Emmy, who thought that hardly any amount of temptation could palliate the heinousness of so gross and sordid and vulgar a sin as that of which her uncle Harold had been guilty. "And I suppose he really repents what he has done, does he not, mamma?"

A slightly bitter expression rose to Mrs. Waters's face, as though she deemed her daughter's inquisition over-exacting; but if this was her feeling she overcame it, and answered quietly:

"All men with any good in them repent the wrong that they have done, Emmy."

Emmy saw that she was paining her mother greatly by prolonged discussion, and, understanding that it behooved her to make an effort of magnanimity sooner or later, resolved to make it at once.

"Well, mamma, I don't mind saying that since you and papa have been kind enough to forgive him, I will try to forgive him too."

It seemed to Emmy that her mother did not quite sufficiently appreciate her generosity in making this declaration. Certainly it was met by a look much colder than she had anticipated.

"I do what I can, I'm sure," said Emmy apologetically, "but of course it is rather difficult to overlook such conduct all at once. I will promise never to tell any body who he is, and surely that ought to be enough for the present."

"You promise, Emmy—truly and faithfully promise?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Kiss me, my darling. You love me, I think?"

Emmy flung her arms round her mother's neck with a burst of tenderness.

"My own pet mamma! Oh yes! so dearly!"

"Then, Emmy, you will never, never break the promise you have given me to-day."

"Dear mamma, I never will," said Emmy sol-

emnly, for the pathos of her mother's manner had gone to her very heart.

And at the time she thus passed her word she did most religiously intend to keep it.

CHAPTER XXI.

TIMON AND HIS FRIENDS.

THE following day was a very important one for the household at the Laurels, bringing with it no less an event than Mr. and Mrs. Waters's first dinner-party—the very first, it need hardly be said, given by them during the whole of their married life. Such being the case, it is not surprising that the occasion was viewed with a good deal of anxiety, and that as the family trio, a long time before the appointed hour, assembled in the drawing-room to await the coming of the guests, there was even in Emmy's mind a feeling of trepidation which not the most unfeigned admiration of her own toilet could altogether allay.

There was a long period of suspense, rendered at last more intense still by a ring at the bell; and then, after a pause, during which all eyes were turned nervously towards the door, came the first announcement.

"Mr. D'Almayne."

This was the connoisseur in art whose acquaintance Austin had made during his sojourn at the Brown Bear, and in whose honor indeed the party had been originally projected. He was not an artist himself, but took some pains to cultivate the appearance of one; that is to say, he wore his dark hair very long, his beard full and somewhat raggedly cut, and particularly exercised himself in a certain restless distraught look about the eyes which he had seen practised by professional friends with wonderful effect.

Having been introduced to the ladies with as much propriety as Austin's inexperience allowed, this personage inquired, as soon as the first courtesies were exchanged, if they had ever seen the great art collection of Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn in Wales. On being answered in the negative, he proceeded to expatiate on the delights of his recent visit there in the most glowing terms.

"One of the greatest treats I ever had in my life, I do assure you. There are gems yonder which it is perfectly delicious to look at, or rather there were, for it is all broken up now. A great pity, really, considering what a centre of attraction it constituted in the district—why, people came to see it from a hundred miles round and more. But well, it isn't for me to complain, for I have picked up some most delicious things for the merest trifle—things that would be the making of any gallery in the country, and for the price of an old song almost."

He had been addressing the ladies hitherto, but with the last words he gave a glance towards Austin.

"I am glad to hear that your journey has been so profitable," said Austin, feeling himself bound to make some remark.

"As for profitable, I don't know about that, for some of the things are so absolutely delicious that I don't think I can ever bring myself to part with them—unless perhaps to some friend for the sake of friendship, and even then there are one or two gems—Why, there's a Parmegiano that

beats the one in the Pitti Palace all to nothing, and a Garofalo—"

"Mr. Tovey."

With a murmured apology to his new friend, Austin went forward to meet the little man, who came tripping into the room with his usual elastic step. After having duly paid his respects to his entertainers, he was presented to his distinguished fellow-guest.

"Allow me," said Austin flurriedly—"Mr. Tovey, Mr. D'Almayne. I believe I have spoken to you about my friend Mr. Tovey, and to you about Mr. D'Almayne, I think, so that you both know each other already, one may say."

The two gentlemen bowed, but, it must be said, rather stiffly and frigidly. Each had indeed heard of the other from Austin, and a strong mutual prejudice had been the result—Mr. Tovey setting down Mr. D'Almayne as a talking humbug whose art went no farther than the art of picking people's pockets, and Mr. D'Almayne condemning Mr. Tovey as a miserable quack who made a living by ruining people with brick and mortar.

"Mr. and Mrs. Elkins and Miss Elkins."

Poor Mrs. Waters felt the troubles of hostess-ship thickening fast upon her. The room was beginning to show a sprinkling of guests that looked quite formidable in her unaccustomed eyes, besides which there was something personal to the new-comers themselves which seemed at once to impart an extra flavor of formality to the occasion. They were all three so very staid and erect and unsmiling and wooden—all three, for Miss Elkins was little else than a copy of her mother, only rather faded and washed out; that is to say, slightly paler, slightly slimmer, and with light sand-colored ringlets instead of iron-gray ones. Mrs. Waters hardly knew what to say to them for nervousness, and even Emmy experienced something of the same feeling. Before either had time to recover, a new announcement was heard.

"Mr. Podmore."

But Mr. Podmore came ambling into the room in such evident good-humor that it was impossible to be afraid of him. For though nobody could be more awe-inspiring than Mr. Podmore at certain times and seasons, he was capable of expanding into a high state of social geniality—a mood which nothing was so calculated to produce in him as the prospect of a good dinner. He was pretty sure of a good dinner to-day, and had come so thoroughly prepared to enjoy it that he was hail-fellow-well-met instantly with every body in the room—every body, except Mr. Tovey, whom he knew to have been Austin's adviser in the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and Mr. D'Almayne, who was a stranger to him; and even these he was disposed to patronize.

Still there is a point at which the worm will turn, and the purest milk of human kindness become sour. As Mr. Podmore was standing by his hostess's chair, bending forward to address her with a smiling courtesy reserved for the most favored of his acquaintances, the door behind him opened, and a voice said:

"Mr. Frisby."

Mr. Podmore was visibly startled—so much startled that, instead of going on to finish what he was saying, he stammered and broke down, and was fain to cover his break-down by a fit of coughing, in the midst of which he took an op-

portunity of looking round. From the sudden change which then appeared in him, it was evident that not till the moment of looking round had he believed in the monstrous enormity the possibility of which his ears had suggested. A dark cloud overspread his brow, which forthwith knitted itself into its most severe and magisterial corrugations; his lips, so lately relaxed in a smile, became pursed up into an expression of inflexible sternness which rendered it difficult to believe that they could smile at all; his whole figure straightened and stiffened itself with dignity and righteous anger. There is even reason to believe that he meditated instant departure from the house, but an instinct of lawyer-like prudence restrained him from committing himself to so extreme a measure, and he staid. Nevertheless, though he staid, he did not in the slightest degree unbend from the rigidity of his bearing—gazing steadily into space as Mr. Frisby approached to pay his respects to Mrs. Waters, and only intensifying the fixity of his gaze for the amiable smirk directed in passing towards himself. So freezing was his mien, that Austin, who had hitherto considered it his duty to introduce his guests to each other and set them talking, absolutely dared not make an attempt in that direction in the present instance. For a few moments a grim silence pervaded the room—the silence of a thunder-charged atmosphere—when, to the infinite relief of the master and mistress of the house, if of no one else, another arrival took place which had the effect of reviving the suspended buzz of conversation.

"Miss Egerton and Mrs. Waddilove."

At sight of her friend's well-known face, the distressed hostess felt wonderfully fortified. There was something in Olivia's presence so intrinsically bracing and reassuring that she would have found herself strengthened by it even apart from the fact that the heiress was a person whom all her other guests would esteem it an honor to be asked to meet; but no doubt this fact was not without its value.

The party was now complete—that is to say, nobody else was expected, and a group of six ladies and six gentlemen were ready to take their places at the dinner-table. Nobody else was expected, for the old friend of the family, John Thwaites, who had been their most frequent guest in bygone days, had not been included in the list of invitations. Mrs. Waters had pleaded hard for him, but her husband had explained that a seventh gentleman would completely dislocate the whole arrangement of the dinner-table, and that it would really be a great deal kinder to ask him some other evening when there were not so many. Then Mrs. Waters, still persisting in her friendship for John Thwaites, had appealed to Emmy for assistance, but Emmy only tossed her head and said it would be a pity to spoil the party for John Thwaites indeed, and Emmy's casting vote had decided the question. And yet now Emmy, looking round at the assembled guests, could not help thinking that the room appeared somewhat blank and bare, and thinking also a little of John Thwaites.

Dinner was presently announced, and after a little floundering, for the host and hostess were too new to their office to manage matters faultlessly, the company were duly paired off and marched into the dining-room. Even there, sit-

ting amidst a glow of plate and wax candles and ladies' jewels, with the gallant Mr. Tovey by her side asking her opinion as to the decorations of the new ball-room—even there Emmy could not altogether keep herself from feeling a little dull and disappointed. Poor John Thwaites—well, it might have been no great harm to invite him, after all.

Probably Emmy was not the only one at that glittering board who found the reality of the entertainment rather flat as compared with anticipation. Whether from an inherent fault in the composition of the company, or from a want of judgment in the pairing-off of the guests, the fragmentary conversation between neighbors necessary to the prosperity of a dinner-party hung fire sadly. Nobody got on quite harmoniously with his or her neighbor. It has been shown that Emmy found even Mr. Tovey's talk about the new ball-room slightly wearisome, and it may be imagined that poor Mrs. Waddilove over the way was yet more wearied by the discourse on high art which Mr. D'Almayne addressed to her for want of a more appreciative listener. Then Mr. Podmore, sitting at Emmy's other side, hardly said a word to her or any body else, in spite of the good-natured attempts made to draw him out by Olivia, to whom he had been assigned as a cavalier. He ate his dinner, he even ate it with more than usual gusto, feeling that it was his only compensation for the trouble of dressing and coming out, but more he could not and would not do. How indeed could he be expected to do more with the man Frisby sitting opposite to him—a low pettifogger whom it was an insult to ask a respectable solicitor to sit at the same table with? To give Mr. Frisby his due, it must be said that nobody could have acted with more perfect modesty and unobtrusiveness. He was very particular in attending to the wants of the lady next him, Miss Elkins, but he spoke seldom, and then in a low diffident voice which seemed intended as an apology for speaking at all. He evidently desired to efface himself so far as was in his power, and as Miss Elkins was miles away from being a lively young lady he was able to carry out this policy very successfully. The only occasions on which he slightly emerged from the background were when somebody at table said something meant to be in the remotest degree humorous, which he was always sure to hear and laugh at, though softly, very heartily, more especially if by rare chance Mr. Podmore happened to be the speaker. But even this did not disarm Mr. Podmore's wrath.

Under these circumstances things naturally went off rather tamely and heavily. Of course to an experienced host and hostess it would have been easy to start some subject of common interest in which all would have been able to join, and which should have the effect of putting all (except perhaps Mr. Podmore) into good-humor with themselves and others. But Mrs. Waters and her husband were not experienced in the least, and, amid their anxiety that all should turn out well, found that they had more than enough to do in listening to what was said to them by Mr. and Mrs. Elkins, who respectively occupied the places of honor next their entertainers at the two ends of the table. Thus it came to pass that the conversation retained its fragmentary character till dinner was nearly over, and that when a

change was at last made it had the very reverse of a harmonizing effect.

It was Mr. Elkins, who, tired perhaps of being answered in monosyllables by his hostess, made the first move towards generalizing the conversation by asking Austin from the other end of the table:

"Have you had time yet to read the report on the Chorcombe Church School, Mr. Waters? You will find it well worth your attention."

"Mrs. Elkins has just been telling me," said, Austin with a deferential glance towards that lady. "Yes, I will make a point of reading it, certainly."

"I am sure you will find yourself well repaid," put in Mrs. Elkins. "And Mrs. and Miss Waters—I hope they will find time to look at it too."

Mrs. Waters and Emmy murmured something or other, and Mr. Elkins resumed:

"The result is undoubtedly gratifying when compared with the smallness of the means. It is not all I could wish, of course—very, very far from it, but considering how scantily supported we have hitherto been, I think we have reason to be satisfied. At least it is a proof of what might be done if sufficient funds were forthcoming."

The reverend speaker looked rather hard at Austin, but before the latter was able to reply Mr. Tovey struck in.

"It will all come in time—all come in time, you may be sure," he said oracularly. "The great mass of middle-class parishioners will gradually become interested—the class which profits by the movement, and which consequently ought to pay for it—and then the thing is done. There are Mr. Dormer's schools at Yeston—you know the Rev. Mr. Dormer, of course?"

Mr. Elkins dryly signified that he did.

"The way they are getting on now is something surprising, and they were in a most discouraging state for years. I have heard a good deal about them, first and last, you see, because of the new school-house. The pride Mr. Dormer takes in that new school-house, to be sure!"

"If the school prospers, I cumber myself little about the school-house," said Mrs. Elkins with some asperity.

"Oh! the school is the principal thing, no doubt," said Mr. Tovey blandly. "Though Mr. Dormer says it is quite wonderful the impulse that has been given to the zeal of parents and pupils by the erection of a building with some little pretensions to architectural fitness."

"If I were Mr. Dormer I would not give much for the zeal evoked by causes so ridiculously inadequate," said Mrs. Elkins sternly. "It seems to me that it is the substance and not the shadow that we ought to consider, and for my part I would not, if I could, change our simple unadorned building" (the school-house at Chorcombe was little better than a big barn) "for that frivolous red-brick doll's house of Mr. Dormer's. Let the children be gathered and taught in a place large enough for the purpose, and I care not what that place is like."

"Oh! of course, if mere utilitarianism is to be the order of the day," responded Mr. Tovey, getting all at once very red in the face. "Only in that case there is nothing to be said but that all art has been a mistake from the beginning of the world."

"Instead of which, art, properly considered, is

simply the most potent popular educator that we have," said Mr. D'Almayne, who had been listening with evident symptoms of impatience. "If the great proprietors of the country could only be brought to understand the boon conferred on a neighborhood by a good collection of old masters, we should in a few years see a general refinement of public taste—"

"At the expense of what I should consider a most culpable waste of private funds," interrupted the clergyman's wife. "Our great proprietors have no business to throw away money on pictures while there are so many unsupported missions to the poor and the heathen."

"A picture-gallery is a mission to the poor and the heathen," rejoined Mr. D'Almayne courageously. "If you could only have been at Llewellyn Court as I was last week, and seen the universal respect in which that family is held all throughout the district—"

"Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn's place, do you mean?" asked Mr. Tovey. "Ah yes! I remember seeing it once—pity the house was such a ramshackle old concern. The greatest jumble of styles you ever saw in your life, Miss Waters."

"That may be or may not," said Mr. D'Almayne with a shrug of the shoulders. "It was the pictures Sir Llewellyn cared about, not the house that held them."

"A very strange inversion of ideas on Sir Llewellyn's part, that's all," said Mr. Tovey, with something less than his usual blandness.

"As for that, it belongs to the old question of the relative claims of pictorial and architectural arts; and seeing that that question has been long ago decided in favor of pictorial—"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Tovey. "There I must venture to disagree with you. What does common sense tell us? Pictures could be done without altogether—are of no intrinsic use whatever; whereas architecture—"

"As you said yourself, Mr. Tovey, there are things not to be decided by the standard of utilitarianism, rather indeed by the opposite. If the architect is to be called superior to the painter because he is more useful, then must the baker and butcher be put before both of them."

As he delivered himself of this argument, Mr. D'Almayne shook back his long dark locks with the air of one who deems his triumph beyond challenge. He had indeed triumphed for the moment, but Mr. Tovey was up again immediately, attacking at another point.

"Well, pictures have been of little enough use to Sir Llewellyn, that's one thing clear; and I suppose he thinks so too, now that they have ruined him."

It was Mr. D'Almayne's turn now to look a little disconcerted, but he also quickly recovered himself.

"Seeing that pictures constituted the only solid part of his property, it is difficult to understand how he can have been ruined by them," was the somewhat sophistical reply. "I am not aware of the exact circumstances which led to Sir Llewellyn's reverse of fortune, but I should say it was much more probably caused by some of those visionary speculations which—"

"Ah! when will people learn that there is only one place where they may lay up their treasures and be afraid of no loss?" said Mrs. Elkins *sententiously*.

"I don't know altogether about that," remarked Mr. D'Almayne, slightly frowning at the interruption. "He paid a large sum away last year to a local church extension fund which some people seem to think accelerated the catastrophe."

"He was ruined somehow among the lot of 'em, at all events," growled Mr. Podmore, without looking up from a plateful of ice-pudding on which he was engaged.

"He! he!" smuggled Mr. Frisby.

Such is a specimen of the conversation which, once begun, went on, with little or no control from the host and hostess, until at last the time came for Mrs. Waters to give the ladies the signal of withdrawal. It need hardly be said that the poor woman, half stunned between the confusion of so many conflicting sentiments and the responsibilities of her own position, was only too thankful when this point was reached and passed, nor was even Emmy sorry to find the evening so far advanced. For somehow Emmy had not enjoyed herself quite so much as she had expected when she so uncompromisingly voted for the exclusion of John Thwaites.

Perhaps Olivia saw something of Emmy's dissatisfaction, and took it upon herself to guess that John Thwaites's absence might have more or less to do with it. However this may have been, shortly after the move into the drawing-room she found an opportunity of engaging Emmy in a little private conversation.

"Well, Emmy dear!" she said, coming up to where the girl was sitting a little apart from the rest, bending over a portfolio of engravings.

"Well, Miss Egerton?" said Emmy, looking up smiling into her friend's face. As she did so, she remembered that that friend was, though unconsciously, her future aunt, and the idea was so strange that she felt as if she should never get familiar with it.

"We are spending a very pleasant evening: But what has become of Mr. Thwaites? I made sure I should have the pleasure of seeing him."

But though Emmy had just been thinking how dull it was without John Thwaites, she would hardly let it appear to Olivia that she had noticed whether John Thwaites was there or not.

"Mr. Thwaites! Oh! I don't know where he is, I'm sure. I—I rather think he was not asked this evening."

"Not asked! Oh! Emmy, how did that come about? He was not forgotten, I know."

"Oh! well—I can't say—that is, I fancy his name was mentioned. But of course one has not room for every body at one's table."

"I think room ought to have been made for John Thwaites, Emmy."

"I don't see why," said Emmy pouting. "One would say you thought it impossible for any body to exist without John Thwaites."

Olivia laid her hand kindly on Emmy's shoulder.

"You know very well what I think, dear—of him and of you too. Try to be a little less flinty, Emmy—don't pretend to be more flinty than you are, at least; you will find yourself a great deal happier."

Emmy tossed her head.

"I am very happy already—quite as happy as I ever want to be. And I never had such a charming evening as this in all my life."

Olivia smiled at her, rather sorrowfully, however.

"You won't be advised? Well, well, I won't tease you more just now. There is Mrs. Elkins looking as if she wanted somebody to talk to."

Emmy felt a little sorry when the kind hand was withdrawn from her shoulder, and was half disposed to ask herself whether Miss Egerton's advice could not be worth listening to, after all. But she immediately recollected what a bungle Miss Egerton had made of her own affairs, drifting into an engagement with a returned felon when she might have had her choice of the best gentlemen in the county, and she could not help feeling the force of Miss Egerton's authority considerably weakened. Miss Egerton was no longer a person to be altogether looked up to, but to be a little pitied as well. Poor dear Miss Egerton!

Soon after this the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, and another stage of the evening was entered upon. Concerning this stage there is not a great deal to relate. The guests grouped themselves about the room as best they could, talking much the same kind of talk as they had talked before, and displaying much the same individual tendencies—if any thing, developed and intensified by a good dinner. That is to say, Mr. D'Almayne was perhaps slightly more eloquent about high art, Mr. and Mrs. Elkins a trifle more zealous about their schools and missions, Mr. Tovey a little more energetic in criticising architectural shortcomings, and Mr. Podmore a shade sulkier. In the same way, it may be added, Mr. Frisby had become, if possible, yet more retiring and unobtrusive. It would indeed be difficult to do justice to the propriety of this gentleman's demeanor. While others—the D'Almaynes and Toveys and Elkinses—showed a disposition to monopolize the attention of their host, and even to elbow each other in a gentleman-like manner out of the way, Mr. Frisby kept himself so studiously in the background that probably it did not occur to one of these to regard him in any sort as a rival.

And yet Mr. Podmore was still unmollified. Grimly and sternly, speaking no word to any one, he stalked about the room, examining the water-colors on the walls severely through his gold eye-glass; grimly and sternly he drank down three cups of tea; and, this done, more grimly and sternly still did he go through the ceremony of leave-taking with his entertainers and those others of the party with whom it pleased him to acknowledge an acquaintance-ship. But among those was not Mr. Frisby, whom he passed on his way to the door without recognizing him by so much as the quivering of a muscle.

It was evident that poor Mr. Frisby both noticed and felt the slight. He happened to be standing near the door when Austin returned to the room after seeing Mr. Podmore out, and, as he caught his host's eye, shook his head, though meekly, very sadly.

"It is strange what I can have done to give Mr. Podmore such offense, is it not, sir? That is the way he always treats me."

"It is a confoundedly rude way, then," said Austin, who on his own account was disposed to resent Mr. Podmore's behavior not a little.

"It is rather rude for one professional man

towards another, I must say. And what can be the cause of offense I have really no idea. I happen to have been successful in one or two little cases lately which I have had to conduct against Mr. Podmore, but that can hardly be called a fault, can it now, sir?"

"Certainly not, but only a misfortune—Mr. Podmore's misfortune, eh?" said Austin, laughing at his own wit.

"He! he! he! Excuse me, sir, but how very good! And then I fancy perhaps I may have offended Mr. Podmore with reference to this scheme of the Beacon Bay railway; he is very much opposed to the project, you are aware, whereas what little influence I possess—By-the-way, I heard something about that matter the other day that I think might interest you, only with so many in the room I don't exactly like—I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes in private? Oh! not just now, but when every body has gone away and you are quite at leisure."

"You are very kind, Mr. Frisby. If it does not inconvenience you to wait so long—"

"Don't mention such a thing, sir—only too happy, I am sure."

And, falling obsequiously back, Mr. Frisby instantly relapsed into his former obscurity. There he continued to remain, undistinguished and unenvied, till the conclusion of the evening, nobody suspecting that during those few seconds of low-toned conversation with the master of the house he had performed a stroke of business with which he was eminently gratified.

The conclusion of the evening arrived in due time, Olivia and Mrs. Waddilove being summoned away by the announcement of Miss Egerton's carriage, and the Elkinses following shortly afterwards. When these had departed, Mr. D'Almayne and Mr. Tovey still lingered a little while, neither liking to go away leaving the other behind him, but not bestowing a thought on the modest Mr. Frisby, who was demurely hanging about the room as though lacking courage to make his adieux. At last Mr. Tovey looked at Mr. D'Almayne, and remarked that it was very late; and Mr. D'Almayne, understanding that a compromise was the best policy, agreed with him, and the two went away together. Probably they scarcely noticed that they left Mr. Frisby hanging about the room still.

"Come and have a cigar in the smoking-room before you go, Mr. Frisby," said Austin carelessly, for somehow he did not wish his wife and daughter to think that an interview with the lawyer had been pre-arranged.

"You are very good, sir. I shall be most happy."

And then, having politely taken leave of the ladies, Mr. Frisby followed his entertainer to the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. FRISBY GIVES ADVICE GRATIS.

"Do you prefer mild or full-flavored?" Was Austin's first question on finding himself alone with his guest. He did not forget that he had come to the smoking-room in order to hear something about the Beacon Bay railway, but, impatient though he was to hear what that something

might be, he felt himself restrained by the etiquette of hospitality from plunging directly into the subject.

"Mild, if it is all the same to you, please, sir," answered Mr. Frisby; and indeed, from the gentle humility of his manners, one would have said that nothing could be mild enough for him.

"Then here are some that I think you will find very choice: some that I picked up a bargain, to tell you the truth, while I was staying at the Brown Bear—a tobacconist's traveller, who sold me a box quite as a favor."

"They are beautiful large ones indeed, sir."

"Yes, I think they look good, don't they? And now I will just ring for something, and then we shall be quite comfortable. Take a chair, Mr. Frisby, pray."

Mr. Frisby lingered an instant till Austin should be ready to join him, and then both seated themselves simultaneously, and set about lighting their cigars. In another minute the something had been brought, and host and guest were left together, secure from all further interruption. Austin thought the time had come for satisfying his impatience.

"By-the-way, about that Beacon Bay railway—I think you said you had something to tell me—"

"Ah yes! to be sure. Well, it isn't very much, but it is satisfactory as showing how certain the thing is to be done. It was just this: I was in company with one of the directors the other day—you will excuse me from mentioning names, I am sure—and somebody happened to allude to the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and—well, in fact (you know how people will talk, Mr. Waters), there was a little speculation as to what the price might have been. So I said I had heard a hundred and fifty thousand, and somebody remarked wasn't that rather dear, but this gentleman—the director, I mean—just shook his head and smiled, and said it would have been cheap at three times the money. That looks as if the Board had pretty well made up their minds, doesn't it, sir?"

If Austin had been less pleased with the drift of this anecdote than he was, it might have occurred to him that the story was neither so long nor so confidential a character as to necessitate a private interview for its narration. But as it was, he thought of nothing except his own gratification in hearing his most sanguine calculations thus justified.

"I always knew it would turn out well," he said, after a sip of brandy and water. "I was never such a fool as to let myself be frightened—no, not for one half-minute, I can tell you."

"I should think not, indeed, sir. In fact I don't know who ever was frightened about it, unless, perhaps, Mr. Podmore, and that can only have been at a time when he happened to be abnormally nervous."

"Abnormally nervous! He's always abnormally nervous," grumbled Austin, puffing fiercely at his cigar.

"For my own part I must confess that I never had but one opinion on the subject, and that was that the Beacon Bay estate was just the investment for a man of property and position to make. Of course it is a lock-up of capital for the time being, we all know that; but then some people can afford to lock up capital; and even if they

could not, it is so easy in these days to balance any temporary decrease of income in one direction by an increase in another, that really it comes to much the same thing."

Mr. Frisby ceased, and smoked away gently for a few seconds, during which he turned his keen black eyes once or twice observantly towards his companion, as though expecting something in the way of reply or remark. But Austin was too much occupied with his own thoughts to give any other answer than a muttered "Of course;" and, after waiting a due time, Mr. Frisby went on again:

"Yes, that's my view of it, and always has been. I have heard some people say that with so much capital locked up it would be impossible for the remaining income to stand the drain of the outlay necessary to make the purchase productive, but I have always answered: 'Sir, that just proves that you don't understand what an elastic thing, nowadays, income is.' Not that I blame them for that, of course, for perhaps nobody but a lawyer in full practice, with golden opportunities of investment constantly passing through his hands, can properly understand it."

Austin looked rather puzzled, but still did not answer. After a few meditative puffs, Mr. Frisby once more resumed:

"But then people ought not to talk about things they don't understand, ought they, sir? There was a gentleman in my office this morning saying the most absurd things on this very subject—it made me quite angry to hear him—that you hadn't half capital enough to make the speculation pay, or some rubbish of that sort. So I just told him plainly: 'Sir,' I said, 'you don't know what you are speaking about. Mr. Waters's property came to him, I believe, tied up in the Three Per Cents and guaranteed railway stock'—it was rather a liberty of me to talk so, perhaps, only I was so nettled at the time I really could not help it—but,' I said, 'you may depend that Mr. Podmore has by this time given him advice as to investments which has had the effect of doubling or trebling the returns. Mr. Podmore may be a little uncertain in his temper, but I am positive that no feeling of personal pique would prevent him from doing his duty to a client under all circumstances.' I spoke out so plainly that I am afraid the gentleman was a little offended with me, only it is always best to speak one's mind, I suppose."

Again Austin muttered "Of course," but did not immediately say any thing more. He understood now what was meant by elasticity of income, and felt much interested in the subject, yet was restrained from following it up at once by a notion that there would somehow be a theoretical imprudence in holding a conversation about investments with an attorney of Mr. Frisby's dubious professional and social standing. There was therefore a pretty long silence, which, however, gradually began to suggest to Austin that, as Mr. Frisby was evidently willing to let the topic fall through, its imaginary dangers must be wholly non-existent. And then besides, was not forewarned forwarned? So, taking another sip of brandy and water while he collected his ideas, he guardedly remarked:

"Not that Mr. Podmore ever did give me any advice of the kind, you know."

Mr. Frisby was manifestly surprised.

"Did he not, sir? Oh! but he will, you may depend upon it he will. He is a little out of sorts just now about this Beacon Bay business, but I am certain he is not the man to let his temper stand in the way of a client's interests. With every thing going up so fast as it is, too—oh! you may be sure he will, and lose no time about it either."

"I'm pretty sure he won't, though."

"Excuse me, Mr. Waters, I can feel no doubt about it. I will tell you what may have been the cause of delay hitherto; Mr. Podmore, belonging rather to what we may call the old school, may be a little less in the way of hearing of opportunities than solicitors in a more modern line of business, and it naturally takes him longer to look out. But the best that he can do he will do, I am confident."

"But I tell you I know he won't," said Austin impatiently, for this defense of Mr. Podmore was very provoking to him. "He doesn't approve of such things, or pretends not. I was talking to him about it only the other day, and he told me his motto was 'High interest is another name for bad security,' or something like that."

Mr. Frisby elevated his eyebrows half with contempt, half with surprise and almost incredulity.

"A motto I used to write in my copy-books when I was a small boy," he observed. "I declare it is quite refreshing to hear it again, for I don't think I have ever come across it since. But, my dear sir, you are doing Mr. Podmore an injustice, I am sure. He was joking when he said that."

"No he wasn't," said Austin gruffly.

"Oh! but indeed I feel convinced that he must have been. That is a principle completely obsolete now among men of business, I do assure you. The saying may have been true once, I shouldn't wonder, like a great many other Goody Two-shoes sayings we used to write in our copy-books long ago—like the proverb about early to bed and early to rise, for instance—that may have been true once upon a time, perhaps. And indeed I dare say it's true still that early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, but it's quite certain that it don't make him wealthy or wise, because it is precisely the rich classes and the studious classes that keep the latest hours—he! he! And it is the same with the other old saw—an exploded fallacy quite. Oh! take my word for it, Mr. Podmore was joking."

"But damn it, I say I know he was not joking," exclaimed Austin, beginning to lose his temper under the continued contradiction.

Mr. Frisby, quite cowed by this display of impetuosity, had nothing for it but to yield the point.

"Was he not really, sir?" he answered meekly. "Well, well, who would have thought it, to be sure? So far behind the times—it seems so very strange."

And then, having finished his cigar, he sat stirring his brandy and water in contemplative silence. It was getting late; and as for some time nothing further was said on either side, it might have seemed that the opportunity was a good one for going away, or at least for taking the preliminary step towards going away by finishing the brandy and water. But Mr. Frisby did neither.

After a while Austin felt it incumbent on him as host to say something to keep up the conversation, especially after the acrimoniousness with which he had last spoken. And then the conversation really interested him.

"I suppose you are often hearing of some goodish thing in the way of investment, Mr. Frisby," he said with a diplomatically assumed air of indifference, for, as has been shown, he was thoroughly on his guard.

"Oh! well, all lawyers with any practice hear more or less of such things, of course," said Mr. Frisby modestly.

"And now what kind of things may they be?" went on Austin, still with the same appearance of carelessness. "Can't you give us one or two examples?"

He was afraid just at first that he might have gone a little too far, but he was instantly relieved by the answer, and made slightly self-reproachful as well.

"You must excuse me there, if you please, sir. Nothing could afford me more pleasure than to serve you in any way in my power, but I could not bear to do any thing that might seem invidious to Mr. Podmore. Mr. Podmore, it appears, disapproves of all but old-fashioned speculations; and Mr. Podmore being your professional adviser—"

"Never mind Mr. Podmore," said Austin surlily. "And, let me tell you, I'm not tied to Mr. Podmore or any body else as a professional adviser, as you call it."

"Oh! sir, but I hope you have no idea—"

"Never mind that. Come, Mr. Frisby, you can give a plain answer to a plain question, surely. What is your notion of a good investment at the present moment?"

"Well, as you insist," said Mr. Frisby, reluctantly. "But really it is a very difficult question to answer. There are so many good things in the market—what I should call good things, at least. There is the Madagascar Canal Company, paying fourteen per cent., with the guaranty of the native Government; and there is the Otaheite Gas, with a paid up capital of fifty thousand, and ten per cent., shares doing at eighty-four and a quarter ex div. Then there is the Posthumous Insurance Company, on the new principle of payment of premiums by survivors after getting their money, instead of by poor devils beforehand who know they will never live to get it at all—a very good idea, and certain to take with the public; and there is the Sahara Irrigation Company, and the Palace of Art Company—all first-class undertakings, thoroughly sound and highly remunerative."

"I am much obliged to you for your information," said Austin warily. "I am not thinking of any thing of the sort just now exactly, you understand, but a few facts never come amiss, do they? Let me see, would you favor me with the names again?" here he produced a note-book and pencil.

The lawyer once more enumerated his list of desirable investments, which Austin duly jotted down. The note-book was on the point of being put up again, when Mr. Frisby subjoined, speaking very slowly and hesitatingly, as though the words were being dragged from him against his will:

"These are all pretty good things, sir, but I

would not say that they are the very best I know of. I will not deceive you—there is something better than any of these— But we will say no more about it, if you please. I just thought I would mention the subject, so that if you should ever hear any thing about it afterwards you might not think I had said that which was not.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Austin, looking at him rather suspiciously. “If you know of any thing better, why didn’t you tell me at first?”

“Because I am not sure how far I am justified— Forget that I ever said a word about it, if you please, sir. These other investments are all of a very superior character, I do assure you.”

“What the devil— Come, I didn’t mean that, but seriously you must be a little more explicit. This is not treating me well, really it isn’t.”

“I feel it is not, but still— Oh dear! I must explain now, I suppose. The fact is, Mr. Waters, in this concern to which I am alluding there are only a limited number of shares remaining to be disposed of; and as I have one or two clients just now for whom I have promised to look out first-class investments, I feel it would be hardly fair to recommend to any one else—”

“Well, but this wouldn’t be recommending exactly. I only want you to mention the particulars, just to give me an idea of things, you know.”

But Mr. Frisby shook his head, and murmured something about “duty.” Austin thus persistently balked, began to wax very resentful.

“Upon my word, this is infernally unreasonable,” he exclaimed testily.

The mild Mr. Frisby winced—it was as though he had not courage to confront Austin in his wrath.

“Don’t say that, Mr. Waters. Well, if it is really to offend you, I suppose—after all, one has a right to consult one’s own feelings sometimes, and, as you say, this is not like a recommendation. What I was referring to, then, was the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, Limited, starting with a paid-up capital of eight hundred thousand, and guaranteed dividend of fifteen per cent. There are a few shares not yet allotted—a thousand or so, I fancy; hundred-pound shares, with twenty pounds to pay up on each—about twenty thousand pounds’ worth altogether, that is, yielding a net income to a purchaser or purchasers of three thousand a year at the least, fifteen per cent. being the minimum dividend. Some people talk of thirty, but I don’t suppose any thing like that will come just for the first year or two.”

“And are you sure it is quite safe?” said Austin, looking a good deal impressed.

“Safe! it is simply the safest thing I ever came across. And then it is limited liability, you know.”

“Ah! to be sure,” said Austin pensively. “So if the worst came to the worst—”

“If the worst came to the worst, one couldn’t lose more than the value of one’s own shares. But you wouldn’t talk of the worst coming to the worst if you knew the principles on which the undertaking is based. I have seen a good deal

of business, first and last, and I may safely say I never met any thing so completely commending itself to my judgment. Perhaps you might like to look at the prospectus, sir. I think I have one somewhere.”

And after a little fumbling the lawyer produced from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he deferentially handed to Austin, adding—

“May I beg that you will kindly keep the document strictly under lock and key? There are some clients of mine with whom I might get into serious difficulty if they had any suspicion of that prospectus reaching you through my hands. They might fancy it was in the way of recommendation, whereas I am sure you quite understand, Mr. Waters, that I am only showing it to you as a kind of standard of what a good investment ought to be—as a kind of ideal rather, for I don’t suppose there is any other at present quite equal to this one. You do entirely understand, do you not, sir?”

“Oh! entirely,” said Austin, and then applied himself to the study of the prospectus.

Here again, one might have thought, was a good opportunity for Mr. Frisby to take leave. He had said what he had originally been asked into that room to say; he had enjoyed a high-priced cigar, and a tolerable allowance of brandy and water; he had moreover repaid these hospitalities by a great deal of useful information; and what more could he have to wait for? But nevertheless Mr. Frisby did wait.

Austin spent some time over the prospectus. It was a very glowing one, and he could not help being considerably struck, not to say absolutely convinced, by its arguments. Still he had not lost sight of the necessity of prudence in matters connected with business, and resolved to proceed, if he proceeded at all, very cautiously. He laid down the paper with great deliberation, and, having gained yet further time for himself by replenishing his now empty glass and pushing the tray towards his friend, he demanded thoughtfully:

“Supposing now I had any idea of this investment for myself—not that I have at present, you know, not in the least, but there is no saying what I might take into my head after a few days for consideration and consultation with friends—just supposing I did think of such a thing, you could undertake to manage it for me, no doubt?”

Mr. Frisby was for a moment quite bewildered with surprise.

“I! For you, do you mean, sir? Dear me! I am quite ashamed of looking so stupid, but I was so unprepared— Well, as you ask, I must answer of course, but I am afraid— You must excuse me, sir, if you please; the more I consider the matter, the more I see it won’t do. For myself I should be only too happy to serve you, but then only think of the construction that Mr. Podmore might put upon it. I could not bear any appearance of meddling between another professional gentleman and one of his clients.”

“Bother Mr. Podmore!” wrathfully commented Austin, on whom the very name was beginning to have an irritant effect; “let him put what construction on it he likes. And as for my being one of his clients, why, if he don’t mind what he’s about I shan’t be one of his clients long, that’s all.”

"Oh! Mr. Waters, nothing could grieve me more than to hear—"

"Come, let's have no more nonsense about that. Are you willing to oblige me in this little matter, or are you not?"

Mr. Frisby, thus driven into a corner, paused an instant in visible hesitation. Apparently he tried hard to refuse, but could not bring himself to do such outrage to his feelings.

"If you absolutely insist, sir," he faltered at last.

"That's right," said Austin, put into good-humor again by the victory. "Then if within the next two or three days I make up my mind and send you word, it will do, I suppose?"

"I shall be delighted to oblige you, I'm sure. But—but—" Again Mr. Frisby showed symptoms of an inner struggle, in which, however, this time duty seemed to prevail against feeling; for he went on, in firmer and more assured tones: "I have to make one reservation, sir, and that is in case I should in the meanwhile receive prior instructions from one of those clients to whom I have already recommended the undertaking. I could not otherwise feel that I was doing my duty—really I could not, Mr. Waters."

This hitch in the negotiation chafed Austin not a little.

"Pooh! you don't mean that seriously, surely."

"Indeed but I do," said Mr. Frisby sadly, "I could not else be happy in my mind. If a client—one whose interests I am bound to consider as my own—were to come to me with instructions, say for a thousand shares, how could I have the face to tell him that he must wait for the decision of a gentleman to whom I had subsequently mentioned the subject? I could not; it is no use to talk of it. We must just hope that the contingency may not occur; but I will be candid with you, sir, I have no confidence that it will not. The competition is very keen."

Mr. Frisby spoke so firmly that further argument or persuasion was evidently altogether useless. Austin sat silent for a while, endeavoring to get over his annoyance as best he could. It was really extremely provoking, this uncertainty about the completion of an investment which was manifestly the exact thing he had been looking for—the rare advantages of which indeed this very uncertainty conclusively proved. As he reflected on all the chances intervening between him and the golden prize, the conviction grew upon him that one mode, and one only, existed of obtaining it.

"If I gave my order to-night, you would consider I had the prior claim in that case, would you not?"

The words had no sooner left his lips than he was a little dismayed at his own apparent imprudence. Was it not possible that this was the point to which Mr. Frisby had been endeavoring to lead him up? But in the next moment his unworthy suspicions were dissipated like chaff before the wind.

"Sir, you must forgive me, but I must decline to receive instructions on the subject to-night. I feel it to be due to myself that you should not on my suggestion enter into a transaction of so momentous a nature without further time for consideration and inquiry."

"What ridiculous nonsense!" remonstrated

Austin, now quite restored to confidence in Mr. Frisby and himself. "If I am satisfied, I think that ought to be enough for you."

"I am very sorry, sir, but I can not see it in that light. So unusual a deviation from my ordinary practice—no, you must really excuse me."

"Then let me tell you, Mr. Frisby, you are behaving damned unfair," said Austin, with a burst of natural indignation as he recalled his grievances. "You tell me in one breath that you will let me go to the wall if you get an order from somebody else before I make up my mind—"

"I should be compelled in duty to my clients," murmured Mr. Frisby apologetically.

"And in the next you refuse my order when I am ready to give it you. I say it is infamously unjust."

Mr. Frisby looked rather shaken at this.

"There is something in that, perhaps. Only—"

"Only I'll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, you have no right to let my interests suffer from your absurd scruples. I give you that order, and I expect you to execute it."

The lawyer heaved a resigned sigh.

"I will execute it, then. Yes, I suppose I have no honorable choice. You are sure you really wish it, Mr. Waters?"

"Wish it—of course I wish it."

"And how many shares would you like to have?" asked Mr. Frisby, sighing again. "Not the whole thousand or eleven hundred that are in the market?"

"I don't see why not. Do you mean to say you shouldn't advise it?"

"I should advise it, certainly, under ordinary circumstances. But I am afraid it looks so very invidious, my entering into an affair of such magnitude at so short a notice—"

"Oh! if that's all, never mind that. Buy up every thing you can get, and don't bother your head about any thing else."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Frisby meekly. And then with a depressed air he finished his brandy and water, after which he mechanically looked at his watch.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, rising in great trepidation, "I had no notion of its being so late. I'm sure how I am ever to apologize for trespassing on you so long—good-night, sir—no, no, not another moment. And with reference to that little affair, you are quite certain you will not change your mind?"

"Really, Mr. Frisby, I consider it no compliment—"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I will not breathe another word on the subject. The thing shall be settled for you to-morrow. And now, positively, I must say good-night—no, pray don't trouble yourself, I can find my way quite well."

But the master of the house insisted on seeing his guest into the hall, where, with many friendly adieux on both sides, the final parting took place. As Austin closed the door on his new friend, and thought of all that had been done since they entered the smoking-room together, he experienced a momentary return of the uncomfortable doubts which had already assailed him more than once that evening. There was no question that an important decision had been arrived at with a suddenness which had a prima

facie appearance of imprudence. Could it be that he had weakly allowed himself to be drawn on—But then he remembered that, so far from having been drawn on, he had had a separate battle to fight at every stage of the transaction, and plainly perceived that it must be all right. The prospectus of the new company was still lying on the table when he re-entered the room, and, remembering the splendor of its promises, he felt not only re-assured but triumphant. He drank off the rest of his brandy and water, and went to bed in an extra cheerful mood.

Somebody else also went to bed in a extra cheerful mood that night. This was Mr. Frisby, and it must be said that for Mr. Frisby's cheerfulness there was good cause. He had secured twenty thousand pounds and upward for the coffers of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, and the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company allowed a commission of ten per cent. to enterprising agents who extended its connection.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOVING ON.

AUSTIN did not awake next morning in quite the same happy frame of mind in which he had gone to bed. The idea of the twenty thousand pounds' worth of Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan shares which he stood committed to purchase was the first that presented itself to him on opening his eyes, and he was so dismayed at his own precipitation that at first he was almost tempted to wish that that conversation in the smoking-room had not taken place at all. From this extreme state of depression he gradually recovered as he recalled the considerations by which he had been decided; but even when, by a recapitulation of these, he had succeeded in thoroughly convincing his reason of the perfect prudence of the transaction, he still did not find himself so entirely comfortable in his feelings as might have been expected. He had no doubt done quite right in this particular case, but was it not a mistake on abstract grounds to take any important step with so little time for reflection? What would be thought of the proceeding by business men—by Mr. Podmore, for instance? He was so haunted by this question of what Mr. Podmore would think if he knew, that it was perhaps fortunate for his self-complacency that on that very day an interview took place which had the effect of destroying with him for the time being the last vestige of Mr. Podmore's authority.

It happened that some detail of the routine business relating to the winding-up of Uncle Gilbert's affairs took Austin that afternoon to Mr. Podmore's office. The client, perhaps from something of inner doubt and self-distrust, was in a more than usually pliant and courteous mood, but the lawyer was as dry and frigid as it is possible even for a lawyer to be. He seemed at first hardly to understand what Austin could have come about, and, when this was explained to him, remarked stiffly, fingering the while with an air of dignified impatience the rustling leaves of a document on which the visitor had found him engaged:

"Perhaps, Mr. Waters, it would be better for the future that your legal business should be transacted through another channel. The arrangement would be more satisfactory doubtless to yourself, and I confess that it would be much more so to me."

Austin's countenance fell. He had for some time professed to himself and his intimates an utter want of confidence in Mr. Podmore, and had even talked pretty freely of giving him up some day. But notwithstanding his professions of want of confidence, he knew that his present lawyer was the person whom all the rich people and landed proprietors of the neighborhood employed in their legal affairs as a matter of course, and he had not yet been prepared so far to separate himself from the rest of his class as to break through the Podmore connection altogether. And then it is one thing to give up, and another thing to be given up.

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, surely you don't mean—What nonsense, to be sure!" (Mr. Podmore slightly drew himself up.) "A man may ask a person to dinner—just as a private friend, you know—without wanting to take his business out of another person's hands."

"I should prefer it to be as I have said, Mr. Waters, if you please. It is natural that you should feel more confidence in the advice of one whom you regard as a private friend than in any that I can give; and indeed from what I have seen of the very small weight which my opinion possesses with you, I can not but think it a pity for your sake as well as my own that you should trouble yourself to ascertain it."

"What! just because I didn't take your advice about the Beacon Bay estate, do you mean? Come, that is being very hard—upon my word it is. I didn't do it to offend you—you know I didn't; but you may be mistaken in your advice sometimes, like other people, and you can't expect a man out of mere civility to give up an investment that may make him a millionaire half a dozen times over."

Mr. Podmore only answered by a smile—a smile, however, expressive of such sovereign contempt and incredulity that Austin felt his choler stirred at once.

"I can assure you, Mr. Podmore, it is perfectly true. It was only yesterday I was told on the best authority that the railway was quite determined on, and that the Board themselves consider my investment as the very finest ever entered into."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Podmore, raising his eyebrows. "That information somewhat differs from my own, but on your account I am very glad to hear it."

"And pray what may your information be, Mr. Podmore?" demanded Austin in growing indignation.

"As you ask, I heard that at the last meeting of the Board there was a great deal of disagreement on the subject, and that in the end the whole question was adjourned *sine die*. But possibly I may have been misinformed."

"Possibly you may," sneered Austin, for the exhibition of so much obstinacy, ignorance, and folly had fairly broken down his self-restraint; "possibly you may. And possibly the wish may have been father to the thought, Mr. Podmore; possibly you think there will be no rail-

way because you wish that there may be none. Oh! I know very well you have always been against it."

"I am against all things which cost money in the making, and which I don't think have any chance of paying when they are made," said Mr. Podmore, shrugging his shoulders. "But really I must again say that I do not perceive the utility of your asking my opinion on this or any other subject."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Podmore, I really don't see it either."

"I suppose, then, there is nothing more to be said," rejoined the lawyer, with a slight contraction of the brows, but still fingering his papers with calm dignity.

"I suppose not," said Austin, taking up his hat.

He made his adieux with scanty ceremony, and straightway shook the dust of Mr. Podmore's office from his feet, bending his steps homeward in a state of wrath which tended more to restore him to self-satisfaction than perhaps any thing else could have done. And so that absurd old fool persisted in making out there would be no railway, did he? Much he knew about it indeed! Why, had not Mr. Tovey proved over and over again to demonstration that the Beacon Bay Extension would just be the most paying line, or portion of a line, in the kingdom, and was it likely the directors would not understand what was good for them quite as well as Mr. Tovey could do? Then had not Mr. Frisby brought positive information showing that the directors had not only understood their own interests, but were determined to act on that understanding? Had not Mr. Frisby from the first declared the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate the best investment of the age? And Mr. Frisby had no imaginable motive for saying so if he did not think it; on the contrary, the speculation not being recommended by him, his interests seemed rather to lie in undervaluing it—that was quite a conceivable trick, and one which he, Austin, would have seen through in a moment. But instead of that, Mr. Frisby, enlightened man of business and of the world as he was, had hardly been able to find words strong enough to express his admiration of the enterprise. How conclusively this proved his superiority over an old antediluvian like Podmore, with his cant about high interest and bad security, forsooth! Oh yes! it was impossible that any mistake could have been made in taking the advice of such a man in that matter of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan, or in any other. A blessed change indeed to have got rid of a Podmore (only fancy the pompous humbug presuming to turn him off!) and to have secured the services of a Frisby.

And so cheering did Austin find these and similar reflections, that by the time he reached home he was once more in capital spirits.

Sustained partly by his ire against Mr. Podmore, partly by the representations of Mr. Frisby (now regularly installed as the family lawyer), Austin continued to be in more or less good spirits for some days to come. But unusual elation is proverbially apt to be followed by a reaction, and so it was with Austin now. As the excitement of the scene with Mr. Podmore wore off, as Mr. Frisby's conversation began to lose

something of its first novelty, and still no definite tidings were received of the Beacon Bay railway, the jovial tones of the master's voice became day by day less frequently heard in the household at the Laurels, and a certain careworn expression of his face already familiar to his wife and daughter grew perceptibly more habitual and marked. Not that he admitted any cause for anxiety, nor indeed was any new cause for anxiety in existence. It had always been part of Mr. Tovey's reckoning, and consequently of Austin's, that a decision of the directors in favor of the new branch might probably be kept secret till the moment at which it should become necessary to take the first practical steps towards its execution, so as to allow as little time as possible for opposition to organize itself. And yet, though Austin had by no means lost sight of this contingency, and was always insisting that he should not be a bit surprised if he had to wait months for a further scrap of good news, there is no doubt that he was on the constant look-out for such news, and that, if it had come, it would have instantaneously enabled him to shake off the dejection into which he had gradually fallen.

But day followed day, week followed week, bringing no word of the Beacon Bay railway, and Austin's dejection still continued—rather indeed became more and more visible. He said there was nothing the matter with him, but it was evident that he took little or no pleasure in any thing he did.

All through that summer he remained in much the same listless, apathetic state. It was a very busy summer for him, but none of the manifold occupations which it brought seemed to be sufficiently interesting to rouse him to permanent cheerfulness. And yet one would have thought that there was enough going on about him to furnish matter of supreme interest and satisfaction. The plans for the future city of Waterson were fully completed, and such of the works as were already begun were advancing with a rapidity which thrilled Mr. Tovey's bosom with pride and gratification; while nearer home Chorcombe Lodge was developing into a stately pile which more than realized its owner's most ambitious visions. But though Austin duly went over to inspect operations at Beacon Bay as often as he was told that there was any occasion for his supervision, though he could not but understand that every thing was going on there as well as heart could wish, still somehow those visits did not give him pleasure. He could not admire the graceful outlines of the new crescent already beginning to rise from amid a chaos of mud and sand and builders' rubbish, without asking himself when he should hear something of the railway which was to bring down the future population of tenants and lodgers; and though he had an assured conviction that all must and would come right, the question pressed on his brain with a painful weight of anxiety that always made him return from Beacon Bay looking quite ill and miserable. It might have been deemed that the progress of Chorcombe Lodge would at least have been an unalloyed pleasure to him, but such was not the case—brick and mortar at Chorcombe Lodge was too suggestive of brick and mortar at Beacon Bay.

In the midst of this general drooping of his spirits, there was one fact of which he himself

felt that it ought to have a reassuring influence, and yet which from some cause or other altogether failed of that effect. This was the increase of income secured by his investment in the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan. The thorough soundness of this enterprise had been demonstrated to him by Mr. Frisby times without number, while a seat on the Board of Direction, which had been conferred on him at the time of his purchase, gave him, as that gentleman pointed out, the amplest opportunities of watching and controlling the administration of the concern whenever he might feel inclined to do so. Still, so full was he at present of nervous whims and fantasies that he was sometimes almost uneasy for the safety of the twenty thousand pounds and upward which he had paid into the undertaking, and every now and then tormented himself with imagining the straits which, with so much money locked up in the Beacon Bay estate, the loss of even so comparatively moderate a sum would put him to.

So passed the summer for Austin—the first summer of his prosperity. And, as may be supposed, the period which went by so gloomily for the head of the family was not a very lively one for his wife and daughter. Not only was it naturally depressing for them to notice the melancholy which deepened on him day by day; but the diversions which might have tended to raise the spirits of both, and to which Emmy had been looking forward as among the principal privileges of her new position, were from the same cause denied to them. In vain they endeavored to distract him from his cares by suggestions of change of air and scene; he always alleged want of time for so much as a week's absence from home, while all Emmy's hints as to the desirableness of a little social gayety were met by a promise of seeing about it in a week or two, which promise was merely repeated when the date of fulfillment arrived. Thus the days and weeks and months went by—very grandly, it is true, with white-headed footmen to assist at all the family doings and comings and goings, but also rather drearily and monotonously. And though Emmy enjoyed the grandeur, the dreariness and monotony so oppressed her that sometimes, with a weary sense of disappointment and hope deferred, she was fain to confess to herself that this summer, so longingly looked forward to, was the least pleasant of any she had ever known.

At length the summer came to its close—not only the summer properly so called, but the supplementary summer of September and the first half of October, which while it lasts makes the face of nature seem cheerful, in spite of yellowing leaves and shortening light. The decay of the year was a fact no longer to be overlooked, and with the approach of the last days of October a touch of wintriness was already beginning to make itself felt in the crisp atmosphere. At this time it was that an event occurred which had the effect, for a while at least, of restoring something like pleasure to Austin's life.

This was the receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, inclosing a check for fifteen hundred and odd pounds, being the amount of half-yearly dividend on the *shares which Austin held in the undertaking.* *He was very much excited—so much excited*

that before he could go to announce the news to his wife and daughter he was obliged to steady his nerves by recourse to a certain cupboard in his library—a cupboard to which he had often had recourse, of late, at times of more than usual excitement. It would almost have appeared, from his agitation, that the punctual receipt of his dividend had taken him by surprise.

He was a long time expatiating to Mrs. Waters and Emmy on his wonderful good-fortune in being an Anglo-Cosmopolitan shareholder, on the first-rate business abilities of Mr. Frisby, who had put him up to the investment, and on the absolute certainty of that other speculation at Beacon Bay, which Mr. Frisby had no less confidently approved, turning out proportionately successful. When he had done decanting thus, he thought of going over to Beacon Bay to see how the works were getting on, but finding that the afternoon was too far advanced for so long an expedition, decided to pay a visit to Chorcombe Lodge instead.

If Austin was already in good spirits, certainly nothing could have been more calculated yet further to raise them than the appearance which Chorcombe Lodge now presented. The mason and carpenter had done their work, so that, though the painting and decorations yet remained to be finished, it was possible to judge of the proportions and general effect of the building as a whole. Very splendid that general effect was, and Austin, contemplating it in his present changed frame of mind, could not but feel pride and satisfaction in the reflection that here was his future home. He examined every thing in great detail, going over the house from cellar to garret, and asking questions and giving instructions with a particularity which quite astonished the workmen, accustomed for months past to nothing more from him than a mere listless and perfunctory show of interest.

After a long time spent thus, he tore himself away, casting many a backward glance while he went down the rubbish-strewed garden path. He was so occupied in taking a last look as he emerged from the garden into the highway, that he was near coming into collision with a person who, happening to have been passing by, had just stopped at the gate, and was eying the new house with an evidently profound, if not somewhat melancholy, interest which prevented him from noticing Austin till the two were close upon each other.

"Why, Mr. Waters!" stammered this person, suddenly discovering who it was that was so near him.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites," said Austin, graciously extending a couple of fingers. "How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you," nervously answered John Thwaites, for it was indeed no other. "I—I hope you are the same, Mr. Waters?"

"Oh! never better in my life," said Austin, with a glance behind.

"I am so glad to hear it, sir. And—and the ladies—they are pretty well, I hope?"

Here the poor fellow felt a blush rising to his face which made him wish to hide himself fathoms deep underground. He might have spared his uneasiness if he had known, for Austin was thinking of the house, and did not trouble himself about John Thwaites's blush.

"The ladies—oh! all right, thank you. So

you were taking a look at the building? And what do you think of it?"

"It is very handsome indeed, sir. One of the handsomest houses I ever saw."

"Well, yes, I think it looks rather well. And if you have not seen it very lately, you notice the difference all the more, of course. Have you been away anywhere this year? It seems a goodish while since we saw you."

"It is a little time back," admitted John, to whom indeed the "little time" looked a whole age. But on the two or three occasions on which he had ventured to make a call at the Laurels he had been so depressed by the grandeur he found there, and especially by the grandeur of Emmy's reception of him, that he had resolved to consult his peace of mind by making as few as possible of such calls in future. "It is a little time back, but I have not been away—oh no!"

"You must try and look in on us some of these days," said Austin, with an air of more than usual condescension, for, as has been seen, he was in specially good humor.

"Thank you, sir, you are very kind," said John, blushing again, but not feeling very sure whether he would avail himself of the permission.

"Don't mention such a thing, Mr. Thwaites," returned Austin blandly; and so kindly disposed did he feel towards the young man that he went on to multiply his favors. "And at any time that you should wish to see the house in here, I hope you will remember that you have only to apply for admission and use my name; the people will be most happy to show you over."

"Thank you, sir, I—"

"Or stop; it will be better to give you my card. No, I have not one about me just now; but if you like to call for it some day at the Laurels, I will be sure to leave it out. And you may take a friend or two with you if you like, you know."

John bowed awkwardly, and mumbled something that did duty as an acknowledgment. He knew that Mr. Waters's civilities were intended to be very encouraging, but somehow they had a diametrically opposite effect on him.

"Oh! you are quite welcome," said Austin with much urbanity. "And now good-afternoon, Mr. Thwaites, the ladies are expecting me home to dinner."

"Oh, indeed!" said John huskily. "Good-afternoon, sir."

And then, the great man having once more extended a couple of fingers, the two parted, and each went his way, Austin towards his elegant temporary home at the Laurels, John Thwaites towards his plain lodgings in the town. From some cause or other, the poor young man's spirits appeared to have been greatly damped by the interview, and he walked along with his eyes fixed on the ground, and with an expression on his face of even greater melancholy and abstraction than had been there when Austin first accosted him.

He was quite startled when, having gone a little way, he heard a cheerful voice say in front of him:

"Why, Mr. Thwaites, you are not going to pass me, surely?"

At the same moment a slender, delicately-gloved hand was held out (not only two fingers this time), and, raising his astonished eyes, he saw before him *Olivia Egerton*, looking so bright

and radiant that he hardly recognized her until in an instant more he remembered that she had been always looking bright and radiant lately.

"Oh! Miss Egerton! I beg your pardon," he faltered, while he shyly took the proffered hand.

"So you ought to beg my pardon, I think. I could not have believed you guilty of so unkind a trick."

"I—I did not see you, indeed," apologized John humbly. He was in so downcast a mood that he made no allowance for the possibility of playfulness in any body else.

"Oh! I knew that all the time, of course," said Olivia, and then, struck by the utter spiritlessness of his manner, she looked at him rather scrutinizingly, and added: "You have been quite well all this long while, I hope?"

"Oh yes! quite well, thank you, Miss Egerton."

But still he spoke without an atom of briskness, and again Olivia looked at him scrutinizingly, and this time compassionately as well. She was quite touched by the despondency of his appearance, and, guessing its cause, inwardly resolved to help him so far as in her lay.

"You were going into Chorcombe, I think, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Yes, home to my lodgings."

"And I was going in the other direction, to Egerton Park. I wonder if you would mind turning with me a little way—it seems so long since we met."

"Oh! certainly—of course—with a great deal of pleasure," acquiesced John politely, but it did not look as if he were capable of taking pleasure in any thing.

They walked on a short distance in silence, and then Olivia, observing her companion furtively, asked:

"Have you seen any thing of the Waterses lately? I have not met you there for some time past."

"I—I suppose not," said John with a quivering voice. "No, I have not seen them for a long while—at least—that is—I met Mr. Waters a few minutes ago."

"Mr. Waters? Only Mr. Waters? And did you speak to him at all?"

"A little. He was rather in a hurry—going home to dinner."

The words were uttered in very low sad tones, and Olivia understood something of the character of the interview.

"Mr. Waters is a little changed since he came into his money—don't you find him so?" she asked.

"Yes, rather. But—"

"But we must not mind that, of course; and when we remember all the circumstances, there are really great allowances to be made. All those years of poverty and dependence were enough to spoil any body's character. You must excuse him, Mr. Thwaites."

"Oh! and so I do, I'm sure—so I should, at least, if I had any right to take offense. But then you know I never had any claim—"

"You have the claim of old friendship, and that ought to be a very strong one," interposed Olivia warmly. "But, as I said, there are great allowances to be made for him and all of them. Not that there are any allowances required for

Mrs. Waters, of course—she is perfection, and always has been—but that foolish little Emmy, her head is quite turned; and no wonder either, poor girl! Still I believe the child's heart is in the right place, and we must not mind about the rest."

John murmured something unintelligible in reply, and Olivia saw that his face was scarlet.

"The best way is to let all her little airs pass, and take no notice of them," she went on. "They don't mean anything, and it is a pity to give them an importance they don't deserve—a pity for her perhaps as well as—for others. For it is my opinion—and I have seen a good deal of her, you must remember—it is my opinion that she would be just the girl to pretend to despise and look down on the very person whom she most liked and respected, and then perhaps to break her heart about him when she had succeeded in frightening him away. So I would not mind too much what she says or does—indeed, Mr. Thwaites, I would not, but just go on as if I thought she meant the very opposite. Do you understand?"

Apparently he had very well understood, for a gleam of joy had flashed over his face which made him for a moment look quite other than he had done just before. But immediately afterwards it died out again.

"You are very, very kind, Miss Egerton," he stammered, holding his head down as low as possible, for he knew that the words were tantamount to an avowal of his love. "But—but I am afraid—"

"That's just it; you are afraid—a great deal too much afraid. You are every bit as good as she is, and you ought to let her see that you know it; you ought to pretend to know it even if you don't really, and I suppose you don't—the gentleman always regards himself as the inferior being in such cases, of course." Here Olivia stopped short in her Mentorlike harangue, drooping her long eyelashes in sudden confusion, and blushing almost as violently as John Thwaites himself, and beyond doubt a great deal more becomingly. She had just bethought herself of a certain other gentleman at that time thousands of miles away, to whom, he being in one respect very much in John Thwaites's case, her axiom might be held to apply, but how infinitely mistaken was he if he estimated himself so modestly! "Seriously," she continued, recovering herself as well as she could, "you give way to her a great deal too much, and she is a person whom it does not do to give way to. Assert yourself a little, and don't seem as if you were always looking up to her for permission to exist. Will you remember that when you see her next?"

"I will try," he answered, still holding down his head, "when—when I do see her next, that is. But I dare say it will be a long time first; they never ask me now, and I don't like to go to a house where I am not asked."

He sighed deeply, and relapsed into silence. Meanwhile Olivia, compassionating him more than ever, was reflecting how she might best serve him.

"Will you come to my house if you are asked?" she inquired presently.

"Oh, Miss Egerton!"

"Very well, then I shall hope to have a few friends to spend a quiet evening with me one

day next week, and I shall expect the presence of your company. I don't name the evening now, because I must find out first which of the Waterses. But you will hold yourself gaged, won't you?"

He was quite overwhelmed by so much news, to say nothing of a certain suggestion about his heart at the idea of one spending an evening in Emmy's company.

"I'm sure, Miss Egerton, how I am thank you—"

"Then that is quite settled—I will know the evening as soon as it is fixed. Now I will not take you a step farther out way—no, I insist upon it. Good-bye, I am much obliged for your escort so far."

She left him, and made her way quickly road towards where the scant yellow foliage Egerton Park trees quivered wanly in the evening light of the October sun. But she was gone, the consolatory influence words remained, and John Thwaites, to his solitary steps towards the village over autumn leaves that continually rustled as he felt in his heart a whisper of hope which like a legacy from the spring.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHARADE.

OLIVIA did not forget her promise to Thwaites—she was too happy herself, no her best towards making all others happy wise. For, in spite of separation from her betrothed, Olivia continued to be in a state of tense beatitude. The knowledge that she was the one person in the world infinitely dear to and to whom she was infinitely dear in turn in itself so supreme a delight that she could live on it more or less contentedly even in exchange of correspondence and with no time fixed for a reunion. As it was, her lover's letters kept her constantly supplied with news of him, and the last had held out of an almost immediate return to England in consequence of the unexpected facility with which his affairs had got themselves arranged.

Olivia was at this time in a seventh heaven of blissful anticipation, but, as has been seen, her own happiness only made her all the more anxious to secure if possible that of poor Thwaites. Accordingly the next time she saw the Waterses (and she made it her business to see them very soon) they received and accepted her pressing invitation to come and spend the evening at Egerton House, when perhaps one or two other friends might be asked to them.

The appointed evening came, duly brought with it Mr. and Mrs. Waters and Emmy, and one or two other friends likewise, making a party of some fourteen or fifteen in all. The suggestion of the company seemed simple enough; it had really been the subject of a good deal of study, arising from Olivia's wish to make a party sufficiently numerous to admit of *à la carte* love-making, and at the same time to include one who could by possibility be a rival to the intended hero of the evening.

She had at least succeeded in fulfilling

ter of these conditions, though she was a little apprehensive about her success with regard to the former. Besides herself and Mrs. Waddilove, the Waters family and John Thwaites, there were, first, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Elkins; secondly, Captain Tomlinson and Miss Tomlinson—an elderly brother and sister who lived in a cottage near Chorcombe on the captain's half-pay, and both much too elderly to be of the smallest danger among young people; and, lastly, Mrs. Jolliffe, the widow of the physician who had been Dr. Plummer's predecessor, with two lively red-cheeked daughters, and a juvenile son of gawky demeanor and long lanky figure for which his clothes were visibly too short. The elements of the party were perhaps rather too much like those of a village tea-drinking, to be quite consistent with the dignity of Egerton House, as Olivia could not help feeling; but then, what was she to do? A dinner-party would have been much too formal an affair for the promotion of the object she had in view, while an evening party or ball would have necessitated the presence of a host of young men who might have edged John Thwaites out of a hearing altogether. And as John Thwaites was the person for whose sake the whole thing had been got up, every thing was made subservient to his interests on the occasion.

The Waterses were rather late in making their appearance (Austin had been hard at work with Mr. Tovey up to the last minute), so that when they were shown into the stately drawing-room at Egerton House, all the rest of the company were already assembled. The new-comers, who were still too inexperienced in social phraseology to know that one or two means at least ten or twelve, were all three rather surprised at finding so many more than they had expected; but especially surprised was Emmy when, having shaken hands with Olivia, she saw rising to greet her a gentleman who turned out to be John Thwaites. She was indeed violently surprised—so much so that in order to conceal the flutter of her nerves, she was obliged to return his salutation with extra stiffness and frigidity.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites, how do you do? Oh! Miss Elkins, I am so glad to see you."

And then, with much effusiveness of manner, she let herself drop into a vacant chair by Miss Elkins's side, while John wandered disconsolately back to the place he had already found for himself quite at the other end of the room. The beginning was certainly not auspicious.

Meantime Emmy, carrying on a specially friendly talk with Miss Elkins, and demurely sipping her tea in the intervals, did not by any means recover herself instantaneously. At the risk of occasional incoherencies in her conversation with Miss Elkins, she could not keep herself from thinking of John Thwaites, and even casting a glance now and then in his direction. Fancy meeting him again after such an age! Above all, fancy meeting him as a guest at Egerton House—Egerton House, where all the best people of the county were invited! Miss Egerton must really see a great deal in him. Well, this evening, at least, there was no denying that he was looking to more than usual advantage. What a long way off he was sitting! One would almost think he was offended—or perhaps it was just because he was so shy. And yet he could not be so very shy either—only look at him starting up

to put down Maria Jolliffe's cup. What a horribly affected girl that was, and how hideously she did her hair! It was impossible any one could admire her. And yet very likely John Thwaites would be sticking in that part of the room all the evening, just because there was no unoccupied chair over here. It would be strange if they were in the room together all evening and never so much as spoke to each other, but it was almost more likely than not. She might have to rise once or twice to go to the piano perhaps, but of course it was not for her to rush about the room after John Thwaites (the very idea, indeed!), so if he did not come to her—What nasty stupid things those tea-parties were!

And in this opinion Emmy continued all the time that tea was going on, and perhaps John Thwaites, ever and anon sending a hopeless glance from the other extremity of the room, was pretty much of the same way of thinking. At length the last cup was laid down, and the hostess got up and held a short parley with Mrs. Waddilove, looking round the room meanwhile as though passing her guests under review. Emmy thought that there was about to be a demand for some music, but instead of this the announcement was made that there was going to be a charade, and that all the young people were wanted as actors.

The two Miss Jolliffes—sprightly girls, up in the theory and practice of every kind of amusement from cards to croquet—at once protested that nothing could be more delightful, and volunteered their services and those of their brother enthusiastically. Emmy had never so much as seen a charade played in her life, and felt rather nervous at the idea of taking a part in the performance, but she was obliged to yield to the representations of Olivia, who declared that she could not possibly be spared. In the same way Olivia managed to overcome the reluctance of John Thwaites, who was as inexperienced as Emmy, and a great deal more diffident of his own qualifications. But Miss Egerton told him that he was absolutely required, and, remembering what she had said on a former occasion as to the necessity of self-assertion, he screwed up his courage sufficiently to consent. There remained to be persuaded only Miss Elkins, and that young lady being of a very stiff and wooden temperament, at first seemed to think the affair altogether beneath her dignity. But even she was eventually coaxed into compliance by the Miss Jolliffes, who, in virtue of an ancient boarding-school companionship, bore themselves on all occasions as her sworn friends and allies, and now took her specially under their protection.

The actors being thus got together, they were marshalled into the old oak library by Olivia in the capacity of manager, and forthwith an animated discussion began as to the choice of a word and the mode of treatment. Emmy, as being utterly unversed in the subject, stood a little apart, in some trepidation as to what might be expected from her, when suddenly her eye caught that of a person standing apart likewise (that is, apart from the main body of the company, for he was almost close to herself), and she felt into greater trepidation than ever, and yet somehow felt slightly reassured too.

"I am quite nervous about it," she informed this person, involuntarily drawing a step nearer

him as she spoke. "I never acted in a charade before, did you?"

"Never," was the answer, made very tremulously, but the tremulousness was by no means altogether due to apprehension on the score of the charade. "I am afraid I am sure to make some dreadful mistake."

"And I am quite positive I shall. Dear me, Mr. Thwaites, what shall we do?"

"I suppose we must just do as we are bid," said John, smiling shyly (ah! how delicious was the use she had empowered him to make of that plural pronoun!). "We shall get through it somehow, no doubt."

"Oh! but I hope they will not give us any thing very difficult. For really and truly I know nothing about charades whatever."

But already Emmy thought charades very pleasant things.

In the mean time the word and its treatment had both been decided upon, and all the resources of the household were laid under contribution for the needful stage properties and costumes. Fortunately former possessors of Egerton House had dabbled more or less in private theatricals, so that there was a very tolerable wardrobe at command, with the aid of which Olivia—who in the first scene was to enact the proprietress of a ham, beef, and sausage establishment, with Master Augustus Jolliffe under her for shop-boy—proceeded to array herself as much in accordance with her part as possible in a coal-scuttle bonnet and red tartan shawl. Then, amid a great deal of merriment, the remaining members of the company, who were to represent a succession of chance customers, got themselves up as characteristically as might be under the circumstances. Emmy laughed prodigiously, and declared to John Thwaites that she didn't know when she had been so amused.

The first scene went off very successfully. On the removal of a screen which divided the drawing-room into auditorium and proscenium, Olivia was discovered standing at her counter with a real ham and a real joint of beef before her, and in her hands a real knife and fork of monster dimensions, with which she gesticulated very effectively while administering a savage lecture to her shop-boy for laziness and general inefficiency. The lecture over, the customers began to appear—first a woman with a pair of pattens in one hand, and a jug and door-key in the other (the eldest Miss Jolliffe), who came for a bit of something for her husband's dinner, and complained bitterly of the trodden-down state of the female sex; next a man with a coal-heaver's hat on his head and a short pipe in his mouth, who wanted a pound of sausages, if you please. This was John Thwaites, and it being his first appearance on any stage, he made the demand in mild, timid tones very inappropriate to the character. He felt the inconsistency himself, and, gathering courage as he went on, ventured to interrupt Olivia as she was putting up in paper the little improvised bundles of brown rag which represented the sausages, by expressing a hope that they were genuine—a sally which was received with immense applause, and was considered quite the hit of the evening. When the coal-heaver had retired amid the plaudits of the company, there entered a maid-of-all-work with *big basket on her arm (the young Miss Jol-*

liffe), who had a great deal to say of the tyranny of lodgers, and wanted a pork chop. After her came a young lady elegantly attired in silks and laces (this was Miss Elkins, much too dignified a personage to submit to a vulgar disguise), and asked for two ounces of tripe—a demand which created some mirth among the audience, greatly to the surprise of the performer, who had simply said what she had been told to say, without any perception of incongruity. And finally there came a smart little maid-servant, with the neatest and tiniest of caps perched on the top of her head (Emmy), and faltered out a request for two shillings' worth of ham cut thin for sandwiches, whereat Olivia asked if the missus was going to have a party, and received an answer in the affirmative. Then the screen was put up again, and the first scene declared at an end.

"How absurd it is, to be sure!" said Emmy, when she had got back to the library; and the person she addressed was naturally John Thwaites, all the others being busy discussing the next syllable. "Though it certainly is very amusing. Oh! Mr. Thwaites, it was so funny to see you in that hat, you can't think. Did you feel at all nervous? But you really got through your part capitally, and what a good thing that was you said, and how it made them all laugh! I can't imagine how you came to think of it; I felt as if I couldn't have said any thing out of my own head."

"I'm sure you did your part most beautifully, Miss Emmy," said John, blushing crimson at such compliments from such a quarter.

"Did I?" said Emmy, giving a shake of her little head which nearly shook off the neat cap. "Oh dear me! here I am with this thing on still—isn't it ridiculous? I suppose I am the oddest-looking figure, am I not?"

He surveyed her admiringly—so admiringly that she began to blush in her turn—and seemed about to make a very gallant answer, when the pair were called upon to take their instructions for the next scene, the programme of which had now been decided.

"I am to be a frugally-minded lady, who, wishing to go to the sea-side, resolves to let her house furnished during her absence," said Olivia, "and now we have got to think how my household is to be constructed. Let me see, the Miss Jolliffes have so much humor, and do so excel in soubrette characters, that I must positively secure them for cook and housemaid; these are always the most difficult parts, and need the best acting. Then there must be a page, of course, with buttons all the way down—oh! you will do that, Mr. Augustus, won't you? And you will be a young lady visitor, perhaps, Miss Elkins, and then there will be no trouble about altering your dress. And now let me see," she went on meditatively, "we must have a lady and gentleman to come after the house—oh! of course Mr. Thwaites and Miss Waters will do that," she added, with a semi-triumphant air, as though she had only just thought of them. "You are to be Mr. Snoggins, if you please, Mr. Thwaites—Mr. Samuel Snoggins—and you are to be Mrs. Snoggins, Emmy; mind you don't forget the name."

"Oh! but I am sure I shall," said Emmy, pouting, yet apparently not altogether displeased. "Snoggins!"—(she did not like to say Mrs. Snoggins, considering who Mr. Snoggins was to

be)—“what a ridiculous name, to be sure—and then such a silly part— Oh! upon my word I think somebody else had better do it.”

“But you see, dear, all the rest have got their parts already. Come, you really must oblige us.”

“Oh yes! Miss Emmy, you really must,” put in John Thwaites in a pleading whisper.

“Oh! well, I suppose I must,” said Emmy, still pouting, but blushing very much at the same time. “Only it is so very, very absurd, you know.”

Things being thus arranged, the necessary preparations were made, and the second scene began. Olivia, in the character of the frugal-minded lady, was discovered in the midst of her household, announcing her determination to let her house during her stay at the sea-side, and instructing her servants how to answer any intending tenant who might privately question them as to damp or black beetles, the existence of which they were strenuously to deny. While this was going on in the room, Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were waiting outside, ready to enter on a signal from one of the actors; and as the Miss Jolliffes threw themselves into the spirit of their parts with great zest, and were very eloquent on the subject of board wages, the signal was a long time in coming.

“I am getting so nervous again,” whispered Emmy, as they thus waited. “I am so much afraid of making some mistake.”

“Oh no! you won’t, Miss Emmy. You remember the name, I hope?”

“Snoggins?” said Emmy, blushing.

“Yes, and my name is Samuel. By-the-way, you must be sure to call me Sam once or twice.”

He was almost afraid that his new-found courage had carried him too far, but instead of looking disdainful, as he had feared, she only blushed a little more, and toyed with her bracelet while she murmured that she didn’t think it would be necessary to call him any thing. That thrice-blessed charade—how it seemed to have broken down the wall between them!

“I wonder how we ought to go in,” he said presently, getting bolder and bolder with his impunity.

“How we ought to go in?” said Emmy.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, ought we to go in arm in arm? Don’t you think—”

But Emmy hastily declared that there could not be the least occasion for such a thing. Still, however, she was not angry, for a moment afterwards she begged him to be kind enough to tell her if her bonnet was quite straight.

Just as he was looking to see, the appointed signal was made, and they had to enter in a great hurry, and in such confusion that the double knock that was to have announced them was quite forgotten.

The scene was got through somehow—rather lamely, it is to be feared, so far as Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were concerned, but each was too much flattered to take note of the shortcomings of the other, and the party returned to the library.

Here Olivia announced that the last act of the charade was to consist of a dumb-show representation of the scene in which Hamlet, accompanied by Horatio and Marcellus, first sees his father’s ghost.

“As the thing is to be in dumb-show,” she pursued, “it does not matter much how we distribute the parts. Mr. Thwaites will be Hamlet, of course; but as our only other gentleman will be wanted for ghost, we must just be contented with ladies for Horatio and Marcellus; with long cloaks and plumed hats they will do very well. Emmy, dear, just try on that cloak, and see if it covers your dress sufficiently—oh yes! that will do nicely. And perhaps you will be kind enough to take the other part, Miss Jolliffe—only first you must please come and help to make up your brother as ghost. The ghost is to be the grand feature of the scene, and we must lavish all our resources on him.”

And then Olivia and the Miss Jolliffes, and ostensibly Miss Elkins (only she was not of much use), all put their heads together as to the manner in which the unfortunate Augustus was to be plastered and beflowered into the likeness of a theatrical ghost, the victim submitting himself with the uncomplaining meekness and deference to his sisters’ commands which he had shown all through the evening’s proceedings. Meantime Emmy and John Thwaites, already dressed for their parts in long cloaks and melodramatic hats with enormous plumes, stood a little apart from the rest, waiting for their services to be required, and both feeling in a state of extreme flurry, as was perhaps only natural, considering the novelty of their position.

“It is all dreadful nonsense, certainly,” remarked Emmy in low tones as she stood casting about for something to say, “and yet somehow it is great fun too. I really have enjoyed it rather, haven’t you?”

“Enjoyed it, Miss Emmy! I don’t know when I have enjoyed any thing half so much. Not for a great, great many months,” he added, with a sigh, for he was getting very courageous, and thought he saw a way of improving the occasion.

“Really,” said Emmy, in tones still lower, while she gave a little adjusting shake to the folds of her cloak. “I am afraid, then, you must have been spending rather a dull time of it.”

“I have indeed,” he made answer dolefully, “and a great deal worse than dull. I have been very, very miserable.”

“Dear me! I am sorry to hear that,” said Emmy, in a voice which would have sounded wonderfully unconcerned if it had not trembled so. “And pray what has it been owing to?”

“Can you not guess, Miss Emmy?”

But Emmy, looking very hard at the floor, and speaking almost in a whisper, declared that she had not the slightest idea.

“Don’t you know that I have only seen you three times to speak to since you came home from Nidbourne? And don’t you think that that is enough to make me miserable?”

Emmy murmured something quite inaudible.

“Yes, only three times to speak to,” he went on; “and then, oh! how cold and distant you were—it made me more miserable than if I had not seen you at all. And four times to bow to you out of doors—and once, last Thursday week, I saw you in a shop as I was passing by on the other side of the street; but you were standing with your back to me, and never looked round.”

“If I pever looked round, how do you know

gentleman and man of the world this Mr. Egerton was!

"Papa has been so much engaged lately," she faltered, "that really—"

"I can understand that where the demands of society would be so numerous, it might be too great a sacrifice to satisfy them all; but surely, you ought to make some exceptions. The *fête* at the Castle the other day, for instance, when Lord Trevorton came of age—I made sure that I should have the pleasure of meeting you there."

Again Emmy felt very much complimented. It was pleasant to have it taken for granted that they were on the Castle visiting-list, and yet it was a little embarrassing as well. Was it necessary to confess that they had not received an invitation? But her mother solved the uncertainty at once by proclaiming the fact in so many words.

Randal did not seem surprised, as Emmy had expected that he would; and certainly the expression of his surprise, though gratifying in one respect, would have been slightly humiliating in another.

"It is natural that you should not be invited when it is known how studiously you keep yourselves aloof from all society," he answered with a shrug of the shoulders. "People don't like to lay themselves open to a refusal, especially people in that station. But it is none the less your own fault that you were not present, and I really think those who were present have some cause to complain."

He spoke the last words with quite an ill-used air, and Emmy felt hugely gratified. Was it possible the Castle people had really been afraid of a refusal? And yet very likely it was so. She thought of John Thwaites, and wondered what he would say if he were to hear of her mixing in such magnificent company.

"I suppose it was a very gay affair," she remarked timidly, by way of saying something.

"It was altogether a very pleasant day. Really it is a thousand pities you were not there; the gathering of county families would then have been almost complete. Did you see the paragraph about it in the papers this morning?"

"I did not notice it," said Emmy.

"I see they speak of Lady Victoria Fenton as being the observed of all observers. I can't say I was extraordinarily impressed with her myself, but she was the beauty of the evening decidedly—for want of a better."

Here his eye, accidentally as it were, caught for an instant that of Emmy, who felt herself getting very red.

"She is very handsome, no doubt," he went on, withdrawing his eyes again to fix them on the handle of his riding-whip. "I remember her coming-out ball last winter; she made quite a sensation. What charming things those coming-out balls are!"

Emmy's heart swelled as she thought how charming they must indeed be, and how happy must be the heroine of such an occasion. Ah! if only her father and mother would give a ball, perhaps she might make almost as great a sensation as Lady Victoria had done. And then only fancy what John Thwaites would think!

"But I suppose it is vain to ask your opinion of balls or parties of any kind, Miss Waters. You disapprove of them altogether, I am afraid."

"Oh no, indeed!" she protested; "on the contrary, I am sure I should quite delight in them. And indeed papa is always talking of letting me have a ball or something some day, only he has had so much to worry him lately— But I think he surely won't put off much longer now that it is all settled about the railway."

"All settled about the railway?" echoed Randal with a puzzled air.

"Did you not know?" said Emmy, quite astonished. "There is an advertisement in the papers this morning which shows it is all right; the railway is to be begun next year. Papa is so pleased; he is over at Beacon Bay now."

"Indeed! In the papers this morning, you say? Ah! no wonder I didn't know—I have not opened a paper for a week."

Emmy was a little surprised to hear this, remembering what he had said as to the paragraph about the *fête*, but presently she understood that he must have been speaking figuratively, and merely meant that he had not looked at the advertisements that morning.

"Papers are such bores generally, are they not? But I am extremely glad to hear that for once they have proved so interesting. Mrs. Waters, I have to offer you my warmest congratulations. I am afraid you must have thought me very odd for not doing so sooner, but of course having no idea—"

"Oh! of course," said Mrs. Waters. "But I did not think any thing about it, I assure you."

"It is very good of you to say so. I would not knowingly have been so neglectful, for the world. Well, at least now you must allow me to say how heartily I rejoice at the news. Will you please present my compliments to Mr. Waters, and tell him that nobody can congratulate him more sincerely than I do."

Mrs. Waters thanked him, and said she would do as he wished. Emmy muttered something about Mr. Egerton being very kind, and looked at her mother rather reproachfully. But, in spite of Emmy's reproachful look, Mrs. Waters did not say more.

"I hope we shall all have reason to congratulate ourselves," Randal pursued. "As you say, Miss Waters, perhaps now that a matter is settled which must have occupied so much of your father's thoughts, his neighbors may have a chance of seeing him and all of you a little more frequently among them; the boon conferred on them by the new railway will then be doubled."

He accompanied this speech with a gallant bow, which made Emmy feel more than ever self-conscious.

"Oh yes! I am sure papa will be quite different now," she replied, with a shake of her curls. "Indeed I almost think I will try and coax him to let us get up a ball at once—it would be so delightful."

"And I can only say, Miss Waters, that I hope your coaxing may be effectual—at least I should hope so if I thought I might venture to aspire to the privilege of an invitation," he added, with a deferential look towards the lady of the house.

Emmy's pulse gave a leap of exultation. And so here already was one guest for the ball, if only her father would let her have it, and a guest of how much personal and social distinc-

tion! What *would* John Thwaites think when he saw? If only her father would let her have a ball at all just now!

Randal kept his dark eyes fixed on her for a moment, and then, perhaps judging that the right amount of effect had been produced, rose to take leave. Before finally doing so, however, he inquired, just as he was shaking hands with Mrs. Waters:

"By-the-way, have you heard any thing of when this Mr. Graham is to come back?"

The name was one which, since the conversation that had followed on Randal's last visit, made both mother and daughter feel strangely embarrassed when either heard it mentioned in the presence of the other. For an instant there was a pause which called up on the young man's face a slight but perceptible look of surprise, whereupon Mrs. Waters, making a great effort at self-composure, answered:

"I believe very soon now, at least so I hear from Miss Egerton. I understand he is to return earlier than was expected."

"So it seems; Olivia is quite in good spirits about it. Well, since what you told me last time I was here, I am in good spirits too—it was indeed a very, very great relief to my mind. Good-bye—my best regards and congratulations to Mr. Waters. Miss Waters, I have the pleasure of wishing you good-day. I hope you will be successful in your pleading, but indeed I can not imagine how you could be any thing else."

And then, with a low bow and another expressive look, the brilliant stranger had departed, and the drawing-room at the Laurels faded into its normal state of dreary grandeur.

If Emmy had been unsettled before, she was more unsettled than ever now. The idea of a ball had got fairly into her head, and for that day she could think of nothing else. How charming it would be, and what a lovely dress she would have, and what a competition there would be for the honor of dancing with her! Mr. Egerton would ask her first, of course—only fancy dancing with Mr. Egerton! And John Thwaites would be looking on—how surprised he would be to see her so splendidly dressed, and how he would follow her with his eyes as she moved through the mazes of the dance with her partner! Somebody would tell him, no doubt, that her partner was Mr. Egerton of Clare Court—how astonished he would be!—but she would take it all entirely as an every-day affair, and would go on laughing and talking and fanning herself quite unconcernedly. And later in the evening (for naturally she would have to dance with all the principal gentlemen first) John Thwaites himself would ask for the honor of her hand, and she would consent, of course—she could not do less. And then what nonsense he would talk, and what things he would whisper about the ribbon, and how he would press her hand when it touched his in the course of the dance, and how she would find him looking at her when she raised her eyes, and how—Ah! that dear delightful ball—it would be nicer even than charades.

Her father had no sooner returned that evening than she began her attack.

"Papa, I have a great favor to ask of you."

"Well, child, out with it," said Austin jovially;

and though he was looking rather flushed and heated, Emmy saw that he was in an unwontedly accessible humor.

"Papa dear," she went on more boldly, "now that it has all come right about the railway, will you let us have a party? You know you have promised us something of the sort for an age, so I really think you ought to do it now. And you have never taken us up to London, as you said you would, and of course you can't now till next season; and every body is wondering at our making such hermits of ourselves—Mr. Randal Egerton was here to-day, and upon my word, to hear him speak, one would think we had given great offense—and I am so fond of dancing, and—"

"And—and—what's the use of so many ands, child? A party—yes, as large a party as ever you like to ask, and dancing till six o'clock in the morning, if you can keep awake. And every body shall fill a bumper to the prosperity of the Beacon Bay railway, what do you think of that? A party—why, it's a first-rate idea. Send out the invitations the first thing to-morrow, d'ye hear? And come and kiss me in the mean time."

Emmy responded enthusiastically to the demand.

"Oh! papa, it is so very, very kind of you. If you only knew how I have been longing for it! A ball in one's own house, how delicious!"

"But, my dear," put in Mrs. Waters in some consternation, "I am afraid your ball will be a very small one. We know comparatively so few."

"And that's just why we ought to make a beginning," retorted Emmy. "Why, you may understand by what Mr. Egerton said how we have been offending people. If we ever want to make friends, we must let them see we can give entertainments like our neighbors, and a small party is better than none at all, at any rate. Besides, it won't be so very small, either—there will be the Elkinsees, and the Jollifesses, and the Tomlinsons, and the Walkers, and the Wilsons, and the Smiths—oh! and loads and loads more! And then there will be Miss Egerton—and by-the-way, we must not forget Mr. Egerton while we are about it; he as good as said he expected to be asked, you know."

"Mr. Egerton!" said her mother, looking rather troubled. "But Mr. Egerton belongs to such a very different set from ours—"

"Oh! mamma," said Emmy reproachfully. "Why, if he is better than all our other friends, that is just the reason for inviting him. And when he as good as said—"

"Invite him, of course," interposed her father peremptorily. "I consider him a very suitable acquaintance to cultivate," and here he waved his hand loftily.

"And then," resumed Emmy when this point had been settled, "there will be the Simpsons, and the Kings, and the Attwoods—"

"And John Thwaites," murmured Mrs. Waters, as Emmy paused to consider.

"John Thwaites!" echoed Emmy carelessly, yet with a slight inflection of surprise, as though the idea were quite new to her. "Oh! well—yes, I suppose so—one couldn't very well leave him out when one is asking every body."

And thus this point was settled also, and the ball took rank among the things that were to be.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EMMY'S FIRST BALL.

ABOUT a month after this, in the beginning of December, an evening came which had been looked forward to and prepared for at the Laurels as never evening had been looked forward to and prepared for there before. It was the evening appointed for the ball.

The occasion was as grand as even Emmy could have desired. In the interval, short as it was, which had elapsed since the official decision with regard to the Beacon Bay railway had been made known, there had been an appreciable widening of the somewhat narrow circle of acquaintances to which the family had hitherto been restricted, and some important additions had in consequence been made to the originally rather scanty list of invitations. For instance, the heads of one or two considerable county families in the district had made a polite morning call on the new occupants of the Laurels, alleging absence from home as an excuse for not having done so sooner, while one or two other desirable acquaintanceships which had languished after a single exchange of calls had been suddenly galvanized into new life by a note or visit of congratulation. Then Austin had all at once found some of the owners and tenants of property adjoining his newly-acquired estate at Beacon Bay laudably desirous of cultivating neighborly intimacy, and in that and other quarters had managed to pick up sundry very eligible guests not at first counted on.

Thus the reception-rooms at the Laurels—draped and garlanded and illuminated till they looked quite resplendent with light and color—were very satisfactorily filled, satisfactorily as regarded quality no less than quantity. Among the more distinguished members of the company was Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, whose presence would alone have been sufficient to give the occasion an aristocratic prestige in the eyes of Chorcombe party-givers. But in addition to the heir of Clare Court, there was the possessor of the far richer domain of Egerton Park; and familiar as were Olivia's face and figure to the dwellers in the neighborhood, her company at a party was always esteemed a grand acquisition. Besides, this evening there was something about her not altogether familiar—a certain glow and sparkle which hardly any one present had noticed in her before, and which would have made her a prominent object of interest and attraction even in a ball-room where her social importance was unknown. In fact there were two or three who declared afterwards that they had had no notion Miss Egerton was so handsome, and that really and truly they considered her to have been quite the belle of the evening. So much can joy do for some faces, and just now Olivia was half delirious with joy and excitement. She had seen a telegram that day announcing the safe arrival at Marseilles of the ship which, as she knew, was bringing her lover home.

But the heroine of the ball and the belle of the evening, in her own and the general opinion, was decidedly Emmy. Hers was a beauty at all times more showy than that of Olivia (as has been seen, it was only under favorable circumstances that *Olivia could lay claim to beauty at all*); and this evening, set off by the most elegant toilet of flow-

ers and lace and blonde that milliner's imagination could devise, she had become, in her own estimation at least, perfectly dazzling. As she took a final survey of her little figure in her glass before descending to the scene of action, she was so much struck with her appearance that she felt quite curious to see what would be the effect on John Thwaites.

The effect on John Thwaites was evidently quite as strong as she could have desired. He entered the ball-room just as the band was about to strike up for the first quadrille, and from the astonished, half-dismayed look which he cast round, she understood at once that he had not been prepared to find things on nearly so grand a scale. Presently his eyes fastened on herself, and she saw that he was more and more surprised.

He noticed that she was looking, and recovered himself sufficiently to go forward and stammer a "How do you do, Miss Waters?"

"How do you do, Mr. Thwaites?" said Emmy unconcernedly, and then, knowing that he was inspecting her, she examined the fastening of her glove very minutely while she added: "I suppose it is a very fine evening out of doors."

"Oh yes! very—that is, it is raining just now, but of course—" He paused and looked round the room again; then, as though seeking an escape from his confusion, asked timidly: "You have all been quite well, I hope, since last I saw you?"

"Since last you saw us?" said Emmy with a slightly perplexed air, for she did not choose to look as if she had nothing to do but count the days since last she saw John Thwaites.

"At Miss Egerton's," he said eagerly. "That evening of the charade, you know."

"Ah! to be sure, at Miss Egerton's. I declare I had almost forgotten," said Emmy, fiddling with her glove-button again as an excuse for not looking up.

"Miss Waters," said a sonorous voice close to her ear—not John Thwaites's this time—"you remember you are engaged to me for the first set, I hope? They are just going to begin."

She raised her head, and found Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court standing by her side offering his arm. She was quite startled; for though she had been talking to him only a few minutes before, she had just then forgotten that there was any such person in the world, and slipped her arm within his in some trepidation. As she did so, she let her eyes rest for an instant on John Thwaites's face. There she saw a look of great pain—of such pain that she could not but feel a momentary pang of pain also. Was it possible that he believed she had really forgotten the evening of the charade?

But she had something else to think of than the look of pain on John Thwaites's face, and the twinge of regret or remorse which it had caused her quickly died away. Her partner led her to her place at the top of the room, the music struck up, he bowed and she courtesied, the first figure was begun, and all compunction was forgotten in a rush of excitement. There she was, actually dancing the first quadrille of her first ball, with Mr. Randal Egerton for her partner (what a polite and deferential partner he made!), and half Chorcombe standing by to see, John Thwaites among the number. For though

she had ceased to feel concern for John Thwaites's pain, she had by no means ceased to take interest in John Thwaites himself, and remembered his presence in the midst of all that there was to distract her.

There certainly was a great deal to distract her. No sooner was the first figure over than the business of attending to her steps was succeeded by the business of attending to her partner's conversation.

"We all owe you a deep debt of gratitude for this evening, Miss Waters," he began, after looking at her for a few moments so attentively that she dropped her eyelids in some confusion.

"I was quite certain that you could not plead any cause in vain."

"Indeed!" said Emmy rather awkwardly, for she felt it desperately difficult to say any thing. But she thought of John Thwaites, and determined to do her very best to keep up the conversation with spirit. "I was not at all certain of it myself," she added, pulling open her fan, and then shutting it again.

"Were you not? I should have thought you would have known better the extent of your own influence."

"Oh! well, I have a little influence with papa and mamma, of course."

"Only with them, Miss Waters? And are you really of opinion that the circle of your empire is so limited?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Emmy, fanning herself. "But I am very glad I have succeeded, at any rate. I am so extremely fond of dancing."

"Extremely fond of dancing!" he echoed with a half-sigh. "Ah, yes! I was sure of it."

"Dear me, how could you be sure of any thing of the sort?" she demanded with a little pout, for she was beginning to gain courage. "Because you think me so very frivolous, I suppose."

"Because it is quite impossible that you should fail to enjoy what you make others enjoy so much," he responded in a low voice, and he accompanied the words with a look so strangely expressive that she felt herself ready to drop with flurry and agitation. Still even at this crisis she did not forget John Thwaites, and, yielding to an irresistible impulse, glanced towards the part of the room where she had seen him last. There he was, exactly in the same place, standing against the wall in an obscure corner, and, as she thought, with his eyes turned in her direction. But he withdrew them the instant they met hers, and fixed them steadfastly, and, as it seemed to her, sullenly on the floor. She looked at him two or three times again within the next few minutes, but there was no change in his attitude, not even when at the end of the quadrille she and her partner passed him quite close in the final galop. Did he take upon himself, then, to be angry with her? She felt quite piqued, and determined that she would ask him what had been the matter the very first time they danced together that evening.

But the expected opportunity was very long in coming. She was not much surprised that he did not ask her to dance next time, or next, or even the next again, there being some three or four young men in the room whom he might naturally consider to have a prior claim by supe-

rior social standing. But when she had danced with all these, and still John Thwaites did not come forward, she began to get very much surprised, and a little indignant as well. Did he not know it was his bounden duty to dance with the young lady of the house?—not that she needed partners indeed, she had plenty of them and to spare, but that was no reason why she should be slighted by John Thwaites. It was true that she had not seen him dancing with any body else, but if he was going to hang about in dark corners all evening behaving like a perfect bear, what business had he to come at all?

She went on dancing furiously with a long succession of partners, but John Thwaites was not one of them. At last she found herself standing up for a second quadrille with Mr. Egerton, who declared that his turn had certainly come round again; but though others were so anxious for the honor of her hand, John Thwaites had still remained in the background. Was it possible that he was too shy to claim a privilege for which so many were contending? But no, whatever he was, he evidently could not be shy, for there he was actually coming forward with Miss Egerton on his arm to stand opposite her and her partner. Shy indeed—no, he certainly was not shy, or he never could have had the audacity to ask Miss Egerton of Egerton Park.

The deduction seemed reasonable enough, but, as it happened, the premises were mistaken. It was not John Thwaites who had asked Miss Egerton, but Miss Egerton who had asked John Thwaites. He had not intended to dance that evening, but Miss Egerton had invited him to stand up with her, and how could he refuse?

"Really, Mr. Thwaites, you make such a capital partner that I can't imagine how it is you have not been dancing oftener," said Olivia at the end of the first figure. "And I have not noticed you dancing at all."

"I have not been dancing at all," said John, reddening—"not till just now, at least."

"And you would not have been dancing just now if I had not had the impudence to ask you. Pray what do you mean by being so remiss? Don't you know it is a gentleman's business to dance at a dancing-party without waiting to be compelled?"

"There are plenty of gentlemen in the room much better partners than I can be," he answered somewhat gloomily, and as he spoke he gave an involuntary glance towards the couple opposite.

"That is a matter of opinion, and at all events you ought to give the ladies a chance of choosing."

"I am afraid the ladies would not thank me for the chance, some of them," said John, still gloomily, and again he gave a glance across the room. "A fellow doesn't care to ask only to be refused."

"But it is your duty to ask, whether you are to be refused or not—your duty as regards some ladies, at any rate. The young lady of the house, for instance—"

"Oh! she has been dancing all evening," he interrupted hastily; "she wouldn't care to—"

"That makes no difference. In common politeness you ought to ask her, and you have no business to be rude yourself just because you are afraid of rudeness from somebody else."

He did not answer; but next time his hand touched that of Emmy in the course of the figure he ventured to look into her face with something of an inquiring expression.

"What a delightful quadrille we are having!" she said enthusiastically as she passed him.

"Delightful!" he acquiesced, with a sudden leap at his heart, and forthwith he resolved to engage her for the next dance as soon as ever he should be at liberty. But then he remembered with a jealous pang who was her partner in the quadrille which she found so delightful, and became once more undecided.

"Now recollect, Mr. Thwaites," said Olivia, as he led her to a seat when the dance was over, "I have been giving you a lecture, and I expect to see you profit by it."

"You really think I ought?" said John doubtfully, with yet another glance at Emmy, for, poor fellow, he knew quite well what Olivia was aiming at.

"Of course I think you ought. And I can tell her she has not had a partner to be compared with you all the evening."

A minute or two after this, Emmy, leisurely surveying the company from the chair which Mr. Egerton had with his own hands placed for her, saw John Thwaites crossing the room straight in her direction. And yet, though she knew that he was at last coming to ask her to dance with him, and knew also that she intended to dance with him when asked, she had no sooner caught sight of him than she turned round to say something or other to a lady sitting near her. She was not going to sit like a statue waiting for John Thwaites, not she; if he wanted her, let him come up and stand till she was ready to speak to him. So she went on talking to her friend, making sure that John Thwaites was close at hand watching his opportunity. But when, having said all that she could find to say, she looked round again, he was not there, and presently she saw him quite in another part of the room. Her strategy on this occasion had not been successful.

She thought that he would soon make another attempt to reach her, but she was wrong again. She danced a great many times, and with a great many different partners, still John Thwaites never came near her. At last the hour of supper arrived (and somehow, remembering that pleasant supper at Miss Egerton's, she had always pictured herself being taken into the supper-room under John Thwaites's escort), but even then he continued to keep aloof. She was not deserted by every body, however, for Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court had come forward in the politest, most respectful manner imaginable, and petitioned for the honor of taking her in to supper in accents that were almost imploring. Of course she had assented, only too glad to let John Thwaites see that she had found somebody willing to undertake the task of serving her. And how exquisitely was the task performed by this new attendant of hers—with what courteous solicitude was her every want forestalled—with what watchful gallantry her every movement observed! Then he was talking to her almost the whole of the time, pouring into her ear a succession of low-voiced compliments that kept her in a state of perpetual blush and simper. It was certain that John Thwaites, though he was too

far off to hear what was said, could not fail to see that she was getting on very well without him.

Nor did Mr. Egerton's ministrations cease even when he had escorted her back to the ball-room. They were among the first to re-enter it, and Emmy had expected that, following the example of some other gentlemen whom they had met returning to the supper-table after disposing of their fair charges, he would leave her while he went back to finish his wine. But he evidently had no idea of giving her up so easily, and, having established her in a secluded corner where an open door made a sort of screen to shield them partially from public view, he brought up another chair and installed himself by her side.

"It is such a luxury to get an opportunity for a little quiet interchange of ideas after all this bustle. I hope you do not grudge it to me, Miss Waters."

"Oh no! of course," faltered Emmy. "But you must not stay here on my account, you know. I am afraid you have been neglecting yourself dreadfully."

"Neglecting myself! Oh dear no! I am much too selfish for that. On the contrary, I have been indulging myself—pampering myself, I may almost say—and here I am indulging myself still."

"Indeed," said Emmy, casting down her eyes. "I hardly understand what you mean by that."

"Do you not? You don't understand that this to me is just the most enjoyable part of the whole evening?"

"Well, it is rather difficult to understand, certainly."

"It is not at all enjoyable to you, then?" he asked reproachfully.

"Oh! I didn't quite say that," protested Emmy, and began fanning herself in a vain endeavor to conceal her self-consciousness.

"Let me do that for you," said Randal pleadingly, and gently possessed himself of the fan. "There, do you like it? Tell me if I am doing it properly."

"Oh! you are doing it beautifully; it is very pleasant indeed. But you are giving yourself so much trouble."

"Trouble—it is the greatest pleasure in the world. I only wish I could look forward to enjoying it for the next three hours to come."

Emmy did not answer for an instant. Two or three gentlemen were just then entering by the door near which she was sitting, and, having recognized in one of them John Thwaites (she knew it was he, though she did not see his face), she could not immediately call back her attention. But she managed to recover herself in time.

"For three hours!" she laughed. "Oh! what a very unprofitable occupation for three hours!"

And then she let her eyes wander once more towards John Thwaites. Actually he had taken up his station just in front of her—he was talking to another gentleman, and so had not noticed who was behind him.

"That depends on how you define unprofitable, Miss Waters. For my part I don't see how an occupation can be unprofitable that makes one intensely happy."

"Oh dear! what shocking nonsense!"

"Yes, shocking nonsense to you, no doubt. You could not sit here and be fanned for three

without getting tired of it, I suppose—not, if I was the fanner?”

“Mr. Egerton!” murmured Emmy, great-sed, all the more so that she thought she in Thwaites turn his head slightly as to listen.

“Do tell me what you think you could.”

“I laughed and blushed, and for the first time I knew not what to say. In the next, she detected a side-glance which John was directing towards her, and under-stand he was really listening. Well, at all he was not going to be dictated to by him. Yes! of course I could. Indeed I think I like it very much—it is so cool and pleas-

ant to you, Miss Waters. Ah! if you knew it increases my enjoyment to be able to be-tell you partially share it!”

“I looked at her with more eloquence of ex-pression than there had been in his eyes yet, and no knowing what he might have gone on for at that juncture Olivia, who had been gazing the pair from the other side of the room, did not come forward, saying very sweet-

ly, “Randal, I think I have left my hand in the supper-room. Might I trouble you to go and look for it?”

“He frowned slightly, but declared that he would go with the greatest pleasure. Olivia then came and glided back to her seat, looking meaningly at John Thwaites as she did so. She expected him to go and speak to her now that the coast was clear.

“I did go and speak to Emmy presently, but with a voice so cold and measured that it seemed to be his at all.

“Good-bye, Miss Waters; I am going away

now.” said Emmy almost with a sigh. “Why, the evening has hardly begun.”

“Good-bye, Miss Waters,” said John obsti-

nately so determined that Emmy felt quite lonely. He was evidently very much offend-ed she did not want him to be offended ir-regularly.

“Do you not better stay for a little more?” There is the band just going to be-

ginning. “I don’t want any more dancing, thank you. I don’t stay any longer.”

“I am not just for the first quadrille after” said Emmy, looking up with something of a pleading expression in her face, for she wanted him very much to stay.

“His pleading expression was not without its effect. He stood apparently wavering for a se-cond, then said abruptly:

“Will you dance it with me, Miss Emmy.”

“Oh yes! certainly,” said Emmy, so keenly aware that she had not even presence of mind to study the little ivory tablets which she was noting down her engagements, and which had made a great parade of consulting all the evening.

“The music struck up, and in great agitation he raised his arm, which in almost equal agitation he pressed, and presently they found them-selves standing together at the side of the room,

waiting for the first and second couples to lead off.

There was silence between them for a little while, neither having any clear idea of what it would be desirable to say. At last, as John was casting about for something with which to begin the conversation, his eye fell on Randal Egerton, who had just re-entered the room and was looking eagerly towards the place where he had left Emmy. As John saw, a very bitter look crossed his face, and, turning to Emmy, he spoke without further hesitation.

“I am afraid I have been very presumptuous in asking you to dance with me when there are so many in the room whom no doubt you would prefer. I can’t think what made me do it, really.”

Emmy hardly knew how to answer. The words themselves implied only an excess of hu-mility, but there was something in the manner with which they were spoken that suggested that humility had nothing to do with them. Could it be that he meant to find fault with her for having danced with any body but himself? If so, what unparalleled audacity!

“There are certainly some gentlemen here who dance particularly well,” she answered, fencing with the subject. “And it is a great luxury to dance with a good partner.”

“Of course it must be,” said John, and this time there was no mistaking the undertone of irony in his voice. “And that makes me the more sorry for having deprived you of it.”

Emmy could not return an immediate answer, being just then summoned to execute her share in the figure. But all the time that she was dancing she was meditating on John Thwaites’s in-tolerable pretensions. Did he think she was going to let herself be called to account by him? But she would say something that would punish him nicely.

“Have you noticed what a beautiful dancer Mr. Egerton is?” she asked as soon as she rejoined him.

“Oh yes! I have noticed every thing. And I think it is almost a pity you do not dance with him every time, when you enjoy it so much.”

“Oh! but you know it would not be the thing to dance with the same gentleman quite every time, however much one might like it,” said Emmy demurely, for she was determined to let him see that she was not to be put down so easily as he thought.

“It would be no worse to dance with the same gentleman every time than to let him fan you for three hours,” retorted John with a kind of desperate courage, while all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his face. “And I heard you say you would not object to that.”

“You heard me say so, Mr. Thwaites?” repeated Emmy, trifling rather nervously with her handkerchief, for the boldness of the accusation really did put her out a little.

“Yes, I heard it. And if I had not heard it with my own ears I could not have believed that you would have said such things—to that mus-tached fortune-hunting dandy, and let him say such things to you—no, that I could not.”

“I don’t see what right you have to speak to me in that way,” said Emmy, looking a little subdued, however.

“What right! What! when you gave me that ribbon—”

The conversation was interrupted again here, and really Emmy was so much upset that she was quite glad to have a little time to collect her thoughts. What should she do?—let him have his own way, and say no more about it? He was in such a passion that perhaps it would be the best plan. And yet no, it would never do to let him think that he had conquered.

"What ribbon?" she asked innocently, when they were standing together again.

"What ribbon? do you pretend to forget that ribbon which you gave me the night of the cha—"

"Which I gave you, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Well, which you let me take, then; it comes to much the same."

"I don't see that at all. If you chose to pick up something that belonged to me—"

"I ought to have given it back again, ought I not? Well, I will give it back again now if you like; it is not too late."

"Oh! of course not. The dress is not nearly worn out yet, and it really looks quite stupid with one of the bows missing."

"The bow shall not be missing long. I will send it back to-morrow. You will find it none the worse for having been in my possession; I have been storing it up, like a fool, in the desk where I keep all my greatest treasures. But I shall not be a fool any more—I will send it back to-morrow."

Emmy felt something in her throat which prevented her from answering at once. So he was actually going to send back the ribbon, was he?—that ribbon which he had made such promises and professions on receiving. Then every thing was to be at an end between them? Well, what must be, must be—she could not ask him to keep the ribbon, of course. But she was so much agitated that she scarcely knew how she got through the next figure.

When it was over she waited for a minute to see if he had any thing more to add. But he stood by her side in moody silence, and with rather an unsteady voice she said:

"If you have any thing of mine to send back, I hope you will not do it so as to make papa or mamma or any body else think it was I who gave it you. I would almost rather you kept it than that I should be disgraced like that."

"Yes, you would think it a dreadful disgrace to have given me any thing, I suppose."

Emmy's heart throbbed with pain and anger. How cruel he was, and vindictive and unforgiving—and how he would like to trample her under foot! But she would not let him.

"A dreadful disgrace—indeed I should," she answered, half clenching her little hand as she spoke. "I should consider I had let myself down to the very dust. But I did not give it to you; you know very well I did not."

"It is quite enough that you wish nobody to think so," he said, looking very pale. "You need not be afraid; I shall find some way of sending it back without disgracing you."

So he was quite determined to send it back, then! She did not say more; she would have despised herself if she had added another syllable. He did not speak either, and, so far as these two were concerned, the dance was finished in profound silence. Emmy thought it possible that when it was over he might make

some attempt to renew the conversation, but he did not. Without a word he led her back to the place where he had found her, and, bowing silently, turned on his heel. In another minute he had passed out of the room.

Nobody could have watched Emmy for the rest of that evening and suspected for an instant that there was the slightest cloud on the completeness of her enjoyment. She danced an immense deal, and with an appearance of almost delirious delight, and laughed and chattered away to her various partners with more vivacity than as yet she had shown at all. Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, who, dancing with her oftener than any body else, had the best opportunities of judging, particularly remarked her apparent elation, and, ascribing it to his own attentions, felt quite flattered.

But when every body had gone away and the house was once more restored to quiet, Emmy did not feel quite so happy or self-complacent as might have been expected from her previous exhilaration. On the contrary, there weighed upon her a sense of profound dissatisfaction with herself and others, against which she had been vainly doing battle, and which now came back to take almost entire possession of her. And so John Thwaites had chosen to quarrel with her! She was not to blame of course; still perhaps there were some things which she had better not have said—about the ribbon, for instance, and the dress looking stupid without it. But surely he would not really send it back—surely he would change his mind when the time came. Perhaps indeed he had never seriously intended to send it back at all; it was quite possible that he might now and then say things he did not altogether mean, just as she herself did occasionally. Oh yes! he had put it in the desk where he kept all his greatest treasures, and certainly he could never bring himself to take it out again—not, at least, if he had ever cared about her as he said he did.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VICE JOHN THWAITES RETIRED.

THE next morning, as the family at the Laurels—all feeling rather tired and fagged with last night's dissipation—were sitting at an unusually late breakfast, a servant entered to hand Emmy a small paper bag with something pinned inside Emmy quite started as it was laid before her—could it be— But surely all that nonsense was forgotten by this time.

"A boy has just left this for you, miss. He says somebody picked it up a few days ago where you had been, and thinks it must belong to you."

"What can it be?" said Emmy faintly, then, seeing that her father and mother were both looking on in some curiosity, she unpinned the bag and shook out the contents.

A knot of violet ribbon fell on her plate. She had half expected as much, and yet was so startled at the sight that she had not breath to say a word.

"Why, that is some mistake, I think," said Mrs. Waters. "It is not yours, Emmy, is it?"

"I—I believe it is, mamma," answered Emmy rather huskily. "My black grenadine, you know; I have been missing one of the bows for some time. Oh yes! it is all right, Thomas."

"They must be very conscientious people who make themselves about such a trifle," remarked Mr. Waters, laughing. "Give the boy sixpence for himself; I suppose that is what he really came for."

"He went away directly, ma'am. I had not time to ask who sent him."

"Indeed! Oh! very well, that will do. Really it is exceedingly odd," went on Mrs. Waters as the man withdrew. "The idea of anybody thinking it worth while to send a thing so that!"

"I am very glad they did think it worth while, at all," said Emmy energetically. "The case has been quite spoilt without it, and I am pleased to have it back again—so pleased." She thrust the ribbon into her pocket as she spoke, vowing to herself that she was not only eased, but delighted. And yet, her delight notwithstanding, she had no sooner got it out than she crushed it up in her palm as though she hated it.

The subject dropped, out of the conversation; at least, for it was as prominent as ever in Emmy's mind. During the whole of breakfast she hardly knew what was said to her, hardly knew what she said herself, was scarcely, indeed, conscious of any thing save of that ribbon lying crumpled up in her pocket—that despised, rejected, ignominiously-cast-away ribbon.

At last, to her great relief, the meal was over, and she was set free from the restraints of observation. Her father, according to his wont, went out to look after the works at Beacon Bay; and her mother, tired with the exertions of the previous evening, withdrew to her own room to rest, so that Emmy was left with the whole morning before her to give way as she chose to weep or bitter reflection.

She was no sooner alone than she hurried to her room and locked herself in, then, taking the crushed ribbon from her pocket, sat down with a pair of scissors, and snipped it first in one direction and next in another, till its identity as a ribbon was quite destroyed. Then she pushed the fragments from her, and sat for a long time looking at them through a hot mist that gradually grew thicker and thicker before her eyes. So he had flung back her gift in her face—that gift which she had plotted so ingeniously to let him have—that gift which he had sworn, on receiving it, to keep and cherish while life was left to him! Oh! what a pleasant evening that had seemed, at how hateful it had really been! what an evening of folly and degradation! To think how far she had abased herself to please him—actually to the point of letting him carry away something that had been hers! and with what result!—to be insulted by having her token returned with scorn. Ah! there were others who could not have used her so—there were others, she was quite sure, to whom the merest trifle at had belonged to her would be precious—hers a great deal better born and better gentlemen altogether than John Thwaites. But he had chosen not to cumber himself with the smallest relic of her, he had chosen to cast it forth as something worthless and odious, and she was sad of it—very glad. For now every thing between them was at an end—definitively and ever at an end—with no more possibility of

being renewed than there was possibility of piecing together that poor slighted ribbon into what it had been when he had taken it from her dress the evening of the charade.

All at once she discovered that scalding tears were running down her cheeks, and filling her eyes so that she could not see for them. Actually she was crying! She sprang from her chair in a paroxysm of shame and anger, tossed the hated shreds far away from her, and rushed to bathe her face in a basin of cold water. Then, because her eyes still felt hot and inflamed, she went to her window, and, flinging it open, stood with her face turned towards the fresh keen breeze of the December day. She was determined, in one way or other, to efface every outward sign of her weakness.

The prospect without was very pleasant. The day was bright and sunny, and the view over fields and woods and villages and distant hills was almost as smiling as in summer, with the additional advantage of a wintry clearness and distinctness of outline. Every thing looked so cheerful and inviting, and the sharp crisp air blew so refreshingly on her cheek, that Emmy began to think that what would do her more good than any thing else would be a nice long smart walk. She had not been much in the habit of going out by herself since the change in her fortunes, but for that very reason the idea was now all the more tempting. Yes, she would go and have a good walk, unhampered by carriage or footman, or other such encumbrance; nothing like fresh air and exercise when one was a little over-fatigued.

She speedily got herself arrayed in her walking costume, and, having consulted her mirror to make sure that her eyes were not perceptibly red, sallied out of the room and the house. She felt wonderfully invigorated as soon as she was in the open air, and, turning into an unfrequented lane near the house, went posting along the rough road with as much briskness and energy in her little feet as though each separate stone or twig that they trampled on had been a John Thwaites.

In this determined mood she got over a great deal of ground almost without knowing it, and with hardly any sense of fatigue. At last, on emerging from a network of solitary lanes and field-paths into a part of the high-road about two miles from her home, she came to a halt, and stood for a minute to rest and look about her before turning to retrace her steps. She found herself surprisingly strengthened both in body and mind, and quite enjoyed the beautiful view which at that point was obtainable of Chorcombe and the surrounding neighborhood.

But the walk, though it had done her good in helping her to shake off unfortunate reflections, had not entirely cured her. She had scarcely begun to admire the view when she caught herself contemplating with special attention an unsightly tall chimney a little way out of the village, which had nothing in the world about it to make it interesting save that it belonged to the establishment where John Thwaites was head clerk. And even when she thus caught herself, she continued to contemplate it still, not of course from any feeling of tenderness or sentimentality, but simply because she could not take her eyes off it.

How abominably he had used her, how rudely,

how ungratefully! But it was all over now—over now and evermore, and a good thing too. The loss was not hers, at all events; she was not troubling her head about him, goodness knew, but very likely he, sitting yonder in his counting-house—

She started, and looked round. She was standing within a few feet of a bend in the road, and had caught a side-glance through the leafless branches of the hedge of somebody coming round the corner in her direction. And such is the power which the association of ideas may have over the imagination that for a moment she expected to see— But no, now that she looked, she saw that it was somebody on horseback, and she grew calm again at once. What could have put so ridiculous an idea into her head?

But hardly had she recovered her composure when it was once more upset. The horseman emerged from behind the hedge so that his whole figure became visible, and Emmy, unconcernedly contemplating him as he rode towards her, suddenly recognized—Mr. Randal Egerton!

She stood rooted to the spot, quite dumbfounded by surprise, and had not even presence of mind enough to look another way. Yes, it was really he, her pleasant partner and devoted servitor of the past night—he to whom indeed she had owed all the pleasure of the evening. How well he looked on horseback—the very image of a gallant cavalier and high-born gentleman, as in truth he was. Ah! what a thing it was to be a real gentleman! not like some—

“Miss Waters!” he exclaimed, reining up abruptly, and looking almost as much surprised as she had been herself.

She smiled faintly, unable to devise any other mode of greeting. She was thinking of what John Thwaites would say if he could see her standing to receive the homage of this brilliant equestrian.

He sprang lightly down from his steed, and, holding his bridle with one hand, advanced towards her extending the other.

“I hardly could believe it was you at first, Miss Waters, though indeed I might have known that no one else— But who would have thought of seeing you here, so far from home, and after parting from you so late this morning? I was afraid you would have been so much tired—I was just riding over to inquire.”

“You are very kind,” murmured Emmy, and her heart gave a little bound at this proof of tender interest. There was one person in the world who cared for her, then! “You are very kind. Yes, I was a little tired, and that was the reason I came out; I thought the fresh air would do me good.”

“I need hardly ask if it has had the desired effect.”

“Oh yes! I am quite well again now,” she answered, looking down shyly.

“And Mr. and Mrs. Waters—they are well too, I hope?”

“Yes, thank you—at least papa is quite well, and has gone over to Beacon Bay, but mamma has got a headache rather.”

“Do you think I should be intruding very much if I were to call this morning to pay her my respects?”

“Oh! I am sure she will be very happy to see you.”

“Then you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you?”

She blushed, and muttered something she knew not what. Randal turned and gave his bridle to his servant, who had just then ridden up, and who forthwith went forward with the two horses, observing as discreet a distance from his master and the young lady as he had done on a former occasion when his services were put into similar requisition. Emmy, who of course did not know any thing about that former occasion (but indeed perhaps it would have been all the same if she had), felt a thrill of mingled nervousness and exultation. That Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court should actually send away his horse for the pleasure of going home with her on foot—ah! if John Thwaites could but see!

“The road is very rough,” he remarked when they had gone a few paces in silence. “You had better take my arm.”

She hesitated a little, then very timidly accepted the proffered aid. The road was really very rough indeed, though she had never particularly noticed it before. As she put her arm within his, and recognized the slight pressure—slight, but yet very palpable—with which it was welcomed there, she trembled and felt that at last she had found her destiny. Yes, there could be no longer any doubt, and a very brilliant destiny it was. To be transplanted at once into the highest circles in the county, to be presented at Court, to preside at fashionable gatherings where such people as clerks would never dare to set foot, to be adored and idolized by one whom birth and breeding alike qualified to appreciate her—what better could she wish for?

“What a charming evening we had last night!” he began when he had thus taken possession of her.

“I am very glad you liked it, Mr. Egerton.”

“Liked it! I never enjoyed any thing so much in my life—except this morning, and I am enjoying this morning more still. You see I am of a selfish disposition, and last night there were too many to share my happiness to admit of its being quite perfect!”

“Oh!” lisped Emmy deprecatingly.

She was so nervous that it was all she could utter. What was he going to say next? The crisis was certainly close at hand.

For a little time, however, he did not say any thing, and she could not refrain from glancing furtively upward just to see what he was about. Perhaps he was considering how he should best go on, for his eyes were resting with rather a thoughtful and perplexed expression, not on her, but on a certain dark stretch of woodland a little way from Chorcombe.

“How well Egerton Park looks from here!” said Emmy, following the direction of his eyes. She was almost glad to find something that should obtain her breathing-time, were it only for a moment, and she did not think it could be for much longer.

“Very well indeed.” He paused, and again she thought the crisis was coming. But again it was put off a little longer, for after a brief consideration he went on to observe:

“Poor Olivia! it is quite delightful to see what spirits she is in. Mr. Graham is expected back in the course of a day or two, I believe.”

“I believe he is.”

"If only I could be certain he is every thing that she seems to think! What is your opinion, Miss Waters? is he a man really calculated to make her happy?"

"I dare say he may be," said Emmy, wincing a good deal at the question. "That is—oh yes! she will be very happy, I have no doubt."

"You have no reason for thinking otherwise?" he asked, turning his dark eyes earnestly upon her.

"No reason!" she faltered, for she felt she was committing a kind of treason in deceiving him when he asked her with such a look as that. "Oh dear no! no reason, of course."

"Miss Waters," and the earnestness of his look became blended with a shade of tender reproach, "you are not dealing fairly with me. You know something against that man, and you are keeping it back."

"Something against him!" stammered Emmy.

"Yes, I am sure of it. Oh! Miss Waters, I implore you to be frank with me—if not for the sake of my cousin's happiness, for the sake of the honor of my family—of my own honor, that is. What! you know something on which my honor depends, and you will not tell me?"

"What should I know?" said Emmy feebly. "You can not expect me to know more of him than mamma, and she has told you that he was quite respectable."

"And for that far be it from me to blame her. Such questions as I put to your mother that day—impertinent questions, if you will—she had a perfect right to answer as she pleased; my honor and the honor of my family are nothing to her—not yet, at least. But from *you*—ah! from *you*—"

He pressed her arm again, and gazed into her face with such profound tenderness that Emmy could not but feel that already they were as one. Ah! if John Thwaites could only know!

"If *you* tell me there is nothing against him, I will be content," he said, gazing at her still.

She could not have told him so for the world; she would have despised herself for such an abuse of his chivalrous confidence. And yet if she did not tell him so, was not all concealment virtually at an end? What should she do? Ah! what but throw herself at once on his generosity and his love?

"He did something wrong once, when he was quite a young man. But that was a great, great many years ago."

"Something wrong—and what was it?" demanded Randal.

He spoke so eagerly that she was quite frightened to think what she had done.

"Ah! you will never tell any body, will you?" she cried in terror. "It was so many years ago, and he is so sorry for it now—and indeed I am sure he will make Miss Egerton very happy. He is so fond of her, and he is very, very good, I do assure you he is—and poor mamma— Oh! promise, promise you will never tell!"

And as she thought of her mother, and the solemn pledge of secrecy exacted from her, she was almost ready to fall to the ground. But in the same moment she was conscious of an arm gently creeping about her waist—a strong manly arm with a wonderful power of support in it.

"Can you not trust me?" he said in his most *expressively vibrating tones*.

She felt astonishingly comforted and reassured, and quite clung to him as she answered:

"Oh yes! I am sure I can, you never could be so cruel. It would do no good to tell, you know—only make every body miserable. And poor dear mamma—it would break her heart. Ah! for dear mamma's sake, you won't tell, will you?"

His only reply was to draw her closer to him yet, and she felt that the reply was sufficient.

"But what makes your mother take so much interest in him?" he demanded caressingly.

She was quite startled to find how far she had betrayed herself, and hesitated a while before answering. But how could she keep any thing back from him now? Indeed, was not all that she might say to him only a kind of self-communing?

"Can you not guess?" she said, hanging her head. "Did you never think that perhaps Graham was not his real name?"

A ray of light flickered across Randal's mind—a vague recollection of having heard something of some disgrace connected with a brother of Mrs. Waters.

"Your mother's brother?" he whispered in a voice quite trembling with the excitement of the discovery.

"Ah! but don't tell any body, for Heaven's sake!" she cried beseechingly. "Poor mamma, she made me promise so—"

"What was it exactly that he did—forged or embezzled—something of the kind, I know. What was it?"

"He wrote Uncle Gilbert's name on something or other—I hardly understand what it was," murmured Emmy, writhing under the inquiry, yet entirely unable to resist it. "But it was for a very small sum, only a hundred pounds, I think, and that is so long ago now, and of course Uncle Gilbert was not exactly like a stranger—"

"What is his real name? Not Graham, then?"

"Maxwell—Harold Maxwell—did you not know? Oh! I am afraid it is very wicked of me to tell you, but I would not have told any body else for the world."

She looked at him imploringly, but he did not answer, apparently wholly absorbed in meditation on what he had just heard. So much absorbed was he that he seemed to forget the need she had for support, and, gradually loosening the clasp of his arm round her waist, withdrew it presently altogether.

"You will not betray me!" she exclaimed, seized with sudden anxiety. "Oh! if you do, if you do, what will become of me? Mamma will die, and I shall go mad. Ah! you know you said I might trust you, you know—"

The violence of her emotion roused him at last, and, looking round with the air of one reminded of something that has been forgotten, he asked in a voice of gentle reproof:

"How can you doubt me?"

The words might be in themselves rather conventional and commonplace, but, coming from his lips, they were enough for Emmy. Ah! indeed how could she doubt him? how for an instant suspect that he to whom she was henceforth to be all in all, would take such cruel, such treacherous advantage of her first confidence?

"It is very foolish of me," she said apologetically. "For of course I know that telling you is not like telling any body else—of course I know that you—"

She stopped, almost dismayed to find what an opportunity she was giving him for declaring all his feelings towards her. The declaration would come, of course—had indeed as good as come already—but she could not bear to have it thought that she was inviting it, and kept silence in half-terrified expectation of the use which he would make of her admission. But he said nothing, and she gradually recovered from her apprehension.

They walked on some little time without saying any thing, until at last they came in sight of the servant waiting with the horses at a corner of the road within a stone's throw of the gate of the Laurels. Then Randal spoke—ah! how the sound of his voice made Emmy tremble as she thought of what he might be about to say!

"How provokingly short the days are now! Actually it will be as much as I can do to get home by daylight."

If Emmy had calculated, she might have been rather surprised at this assertion, for it was still more than an hour from sunset, and Clare Court was scarcely ten miles distant. But then Randal had a little commission to execute on the way, of which Emmy knew nothing.

"Mr. Waters is out, you say?" he resumed after rather an awkward pause, for Emmy had been so much taken by surprise that she had made no remark. "And I do not like to disturb Mrs. Waters when she is so tired. Altogether I think I will not intrude just now."

Emmy could answer nothing. What! was he going to leave her—leave her without—

"It is better I should put off a little for the chance of seeing Mr. Waters," he said, perhaps noticing her blank look. "And you may be sure I will not put off long."

He accompanied the assurance with one of those glances of which she had already caught so many—this one, as she thought, more full of meaning than any that had gone before. Her heart beat lightly, as though a load had been lifted off it. Ah! how could she have so misunderstood him? He wanted to wait until he could see her father and make formal application for her hand.

"Good-bye, then, Mr. Egerton," she said, blushing.

"Good-bye, Miss Waters. Ah! if you knew what an effort it costs me to tear myself away!"

He put out his hand, and she let hers rest in it while she timidly looked up with a parting appeal:

"You will not tell? you will not break mamma's heart—and mine?"

"Is there not something which ought to cast out fear?" he answered, and gave her hand a long, tender pressure.

There was not time to say more, as the servant, who had been already beckoned, was now close beside them. In another moment Randal was in the saddle, waving his hand by way of final adieu, while his impatient horse made a rapid start forward.

But enough had been said to satisfy Emmy. As she looked after him with that farewell pressure still warm on her hand, and those farewell words still ringing in her ear, she felt strong enough in her perfect love to cast out fear a hundred times over. Yes, of course she could trust him—trust him even as herself. Was he not part of herself now? How strange it was to think of—the heir of the Clare Court Egertons—so highly born and aristocratically connected—so handsome too, and of such a gallant bearing—ah! how noble he looked riding down the road yonder on that curveting steed which he managed so gracefully! Very different from John Thwaites, indeed! Well, perhaps John Thwaites would be sorry when he heard.

She roused herself and moved forward to the gate in a much happier frame of mind than when she last passed through it. Just as she was about to enter, however, it was opened from the inside, and to her great surprise, her mother, ready equipped for walking, appeared on the threshold.

"What! mamma, you are going out to-day! I thought you were too tired."

"So I was, but I have just heard something that has made me quite well again;" and indeed Emmy, looking more particularly, was quite struck with the unwontedly bright expression of her mother's face. "I have just had news from—" here Mrs. Waters dropped her voice and gave a jealous glance round—"you know who, Emmy dear."

Emmy did know directly, and felt a very disagreeable sinking at her heart in consequence.

"Indeed! He is back in England, then?"

"Yes, in Chorcombe. I have had a letter from the inn to say he was just setting out for Egerton Park, and would call here on his way back. And I am going down to see if I can meet him: your papa may bring home Mr. Tovey or somebody to dinner, and I want to see him first alone. Dear Emmy, I am so glad!"

"Dear mamma! yes I quite understand you should be pleased."

"You will be very careful, darling, will you not? But I am sure I need say nothing about that. You have never broken a promise to your mother yet, and I am sure you never will."

"Oh! of course I will be careful," stammered Emmy, passing her mother rather quickly on her way to the house. "I—I think I will go in now; it is very cold."

She went in accordingly, but she did not re-enter nearly so well satisfied with herself as she had been just before. On the contrary, her conscience smote her very heavily. She was sorry that she had not remembered how very soon her uncle might return, sorry that she had not thought more of her promise to her mother, sorry almost that she had met Randal that day at all. Oh! if any harm should come of what she had said; if—

Ah! but no harm would come, no harm could come. Had he not told her to trust him? Had he not told her to cast out fear? and did he not love her far too well to break his word? How then could she doubt him? Why, even her mother, if her mother could know all, would understand that there was no danger.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A THUNDERBOLT.

"I WONDER what I have done that I should be so happy."

The words were spoken by Olivia, as, with her hand locked in that of her betrothed, she sat in the same room where she had parted from him last, now made bright by the level rays of the winter sunset, and brighter still by the presence of fulfilled hope and entire content. Her lover had returned, never to part from her again, and she felt as though she had nothing more left to wish for.

He smiled into her eyes with a look of unutterable fondness.

"And what have I done, Olivia? That is a great deal more puzzling. For I do not believe it is in the power of any mortal creature to deserve a title of the gladness that is mine to-day."

"Ah! but you deserve it all, and a hundred times more. You need never expect to get your deserts, for there is nothing and nobody in the world good enough for you."

"Little one! little one!" he said, stroking her hand caressingly, "why will you not flatter a trifle more soberly, so that I may have the pleasure of trying to believe you really mean it?"

"But I am not flattering," she protested. "I am only saying what is true—what is true to me, at least. You are not perfect, I suppose, because nobody can be perfect; but to me, I confess—I wonder if you ever did any thing wrong? I certainly can not imagine it."

"You can not?" and this time with the caressing tenderness of his manner was mingled something of earnestness. "My own darling! Well, perhaps you may be right in thinking I would not wish to do any thing outrageously wicked," he added laughing.

"Oh! wicked—I didn't mean that, but I wonder if you have ever done any thing weak or foolish? I suppose you have—of course you have; but somehow I can't realize the fact. Do you ever make mistakes, Harry? Tell me."

A strange look came over his face—so strange that Olivia would have been afraid that she had said something to vex him, only that she could not imagine him vexed by such a trifle.

"Mistakes! oh yes! grand mistakes sometimes. And as for never doing any thing weak or foolish, I often wonder whether there is any one in the world who can match me at it."

"Now don't look so serious, Harry, or I shall be thinking you mean something personal. Perhaps you consider it weak and foolish to have any thing to do with me—is that what you want to imply?"

But he did not repel the imputation nearly so emphatically as she had expected.

"My dearest love! Well, who knows? if I had been stronger and wiser, I should not have been so selfish. For I have been very selfish with you, Olivia—more selfish than I could have believed of myself before I was tempted."

"Selfish in not running away from me when you discovered that you were not to have the pleasure of rescuing me from absolute pauperism! I do call you selfish now, Harry, and cruel and unkind into the bargain. You see that you have made me happy—oh! so happy—and then you go regretting it. But it is too late to regret it

now—you can not take my happiness away, neither you nor any one else."

"God grant indeed it never may be taken away, my treasure!"

"It never can be taken away, Harry; you may think me presumptuous to say so, but it never can, no, not even by death itself. Death might put an end to it, but could not take it away, could not annul the past, could not turn that which has been into that which has not been. And there has been happiness for me, Harry—yes, thanks to you, there has been happiness for me."

As she spoke she raised her dark eyes to his face with an expression which made him forget every thing else. He looked down at her in turn, and a glance was exchanged between them which, while it lasted, seemed to admit each into the inmost recesses of the other's soul.

Just then a gentle tap sounded at the door—a tap which, gentle as it was, effectually recalled Olivia to a consciousness of the outer world, and made her draw her hand very hastily from that of her lover as, with an unwonted sense of flurry and embarrassment, she responded:

"Come in."

A servant entered with a letter.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Randal Egerton wished me to give you this immediately."

"Mr. Randal Egerton! He has been calling, then?" said Olivia; but she asked the question as much by way of concealing her own confusion as because she cared for an answer.

"Yes, ma'am. I told him I thought you were engaged, and he said he would not give you the trouble of seeing him, but would write a note in the library. He told me I was to give it you directly he went away."

"Oh, indeed!" said Olivia. "Thank you, that will do."

She took the letter, and was in the act of slipping it away into her pocket, when the man, perhaps noticing that she was disposed to treat it rather negligently, turned round, as he reached the door, to add:

"Mr. Egerton said it was very important, if you please, ma'am."

"Had you not better open it at once?" suggested Mr. Graham as the servant withdrew.

"Perhaps I had," said Olivia, and mechanically broke the seal—very mechanically, for she did not feel capable just now of interesting herself in any the most important subject on which Randal might have to consult her. "It is from my cousin Randal—one of those cousins I once told you about, you know."

And thus saying she let her glance rest languidly on the lines before her, feeling, however, for the first few moments almost under a physical inability to give them the attention necessary for her comprehension.

Suddenly two or three words, becoming as it were detached from the rest, caught her eye; and though it could hardly be said that they bore with them to her understanding any definite meaning, she felt as she read them a great rush of blood to her heart which nearly took away her senses. But, stunned and half stupefied as she was, she still kept her gaze riveted on the letter. She was almost as incapable as at first of studying it with any thing like clearness of apprehension; but the sight of those two or three words

had already made this difference in her, that for the time she had no faculty of attention left for any thing save what might be set down on that paper.

What was set down there ran as follows:

"MY DEAR OLIVIA,—How much it grieves me to write as I am about to write just now you will perhaps never understand, as I have too much reason to believe that you are either wholly unable or wholly unwilling to appreciate the depth of the regard which I have always felt towards you. But that very regard makes it imperative on me to pursue a course so painful that with one I cared for less I know not if I should have courage to adopt it. Olivia, my dear cousin, call up all the native vigor of your character to enable you to hear the worst, and not to hate me for telling it. I have just learned on indisputable authority—authority which, if necessary, I am prepared to produce—that the man on whom you have lavished your generous affections, the man who, as I hear, is even now presumptuously intruding himself on your presence, is or has been a fugitive from justice under an assumed name. The real name of the person you have known as Graham is Harold Maxwell. He is the brother of Mrs. Waters, and some years ago forged the name of old Gilbert Waters on a check or other such document. If you doubt what I say, I shall be able to bring proofs and witnesses to substantiate it; but the best proof will probably be the demeanor of the wretched man himself, on being confronted with this accusation. Dear Olivia, forgive me that I have been obliged to write thus much, and believe me, now and ever, your affectionate

RANDAL EGERTON."

"Need I add that you may rely on my honor (knowing your feelings towards me as I do, I dare not use a warmer word) to preserve every thing which I have now told you inviolably locked in my own breast? Whatever rumors I may hereafter hear as to the reasons of any change which this communication may make in your movements, be sure that the dreadful truth will never be divulged by me."

As Olivia's eyes travelled over these lines, she could not properly be described as understanding them; for her power of understanding, and indeed of all conscious thought whatever, was for the time in nearly complete abeyance. But, little able as she would have been to render any account of what had happened, her heart was beating all the time as if it would burst, while through her memory there passed unbidden a strange series of vague images and recollections which, all bearing on the subject of the letter, showed that her mind was actively at work, though involuntarily and almost unconsciously, as that of a dreamer. A hundred little incidents of her first acquaintance with her lover—the excitement of Mrs. Waters's manner on the announcement of his coming, the tête-à-tête walk on the beach next morning, the unexpected effusiveness of congratulation with which the news of the engagement had been received, and so on in almost infinite succession—incidents which at the time had passed almost unnoticed—crowded back upon her now, and, though she hardly knew what had suggested them, weighed on her brain with a press-

ure that was almost maddening. Then, equally unbidden, there rose up in her mind a dim recollection of having heard from somebody soon after her first arrival in the neighborhood of a fact committed long ago by a relation of Mrs. Waters, and of having treated the information with contempt as a paltry endeavor to shake her estimation of her friends for a fault not their own. She did not understand, or try to understand, the information treated so lightly the such terrible personal import to her now nevertheless the mere vague memory of that of idle or ill-natured gossip seemed to send a chill through all her veins.

"Olivia, what is the matter?" she heard an anxious voice say at last.

It was her lover's voice, and its sound recalled her to herself at once. She knew now of what he was accused, of what she had during those dreadful moments half suspected him, and a pulse shot through her of indomitable love-pride and tenderness. What a wretch had been to let her trust for one-tenth of a second!

"Nothing is the matter," she said, looking with clear calm eyes into which the light had turned as if by magic. "A lying letter, hardly worth the pains of reading or contradicting, show it you because I wish to show you a letter now."

With steady hand she gave him the letter then looked away while he read it—she seemed to seem as though she were watching its effect.

She kept her eyes averted for nearly a minute during which there was no sound save a rustle of paper; then, wondering at the silence looked round.

He was sitting with drooping head and pale lips almost ashy in their paleness, gazing with vacant eyes at the letter, which had fluttered on his trembling fingers to the floor. As Olivia's a freezing fear fell upon her.

"It is not true?" she articulated, but her throat was so dry that she had to repeat words before they were audible. "It is not true—Harry, she was about to add, but some rose up and would not let the name pass her lips."

He did not answer, but his head drooped lower on his chest, and his hands clenched themselves convulsively.

"Why do you not speak?" she demanded passionately.

He raised his head slightly, and answered in low suppressed accents:

"Because I have nothing to say."

"Nothing to say! It is true, then, that you—"

"It is true that I am Harold Maxwell—"

Olivia sat as one on whom a thunderbolt had fallen. A kind of darkness seemed to descend on her spirit which for a time took away consciousness exactly, but thought and memory were feeling itself; it was as if the whole world were coming to an end. Presently this darkness lifted itself off, and, with a painful spasm of the muscles of her throat that threatened to suffocate her, she returned to something like a consciousness of what had happened—of her wasted and wasted love, of her boasted happiness annihilated, and not only annihilated, but turned into bitter shame and lasting degradation. At that moment she realized it all, she sprang to her feet though she had been stung.

"Begone from my house this instant! Your presence here is contamination—would be contamination in any honest dwelling. Do you hear me? go—or if it is possible that I should scorn and abhor you more than I do already—"

"Olivia!" he cried, starting up. He made a step towards her, so impetuously that she thought he was about to break into vehement denial, or even to catch her in his arms. But immediately afterwards the flush which had all at once risen to his cheek died away, his head slowly drooped anew upon his chest, and he stood pale and motionless before her in the attitude of one who can make no defense.

"You have the right to speak to me as you will, Miss Egerton," he said in a stifled voice. "It was a crime in me to aspire to your hand under any circumstances, but certainly when I discovered that you were rich—"

"Discovered!" echoed Olivia contemptuously. Ah! the poor fool that she had been ever to believe in that transparent mockery, through which her cousin Randal had seen so easily—through which any one must have seen who was not infatuated like herself! And to think of the melodramatic little scene she had been at the pains of getting up in order to increase the surprise of the disclosure! Oh! fool! fool!

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely. "You do not believe—"

"I do not," said Olivia with a curling lip. "What I do believe is that there was a plot to secure my property, from which my good fortune, and not my good sense, has preserved me."

A red spot started to his forehead, and a visible tremor ran through his whole frame; then, drawing himself up to his full height, he smiled bitterly and answered:

"If you believe that, I have nothing more to say."

"There is nothing more that can be said. Go—this is my house, and you are not welcome in it."

Again he trembled, then, glancing up quickly, appeared about to speak. But if he had any such intention, he abandoned it almost as soon as formed, and, once more lowering his eyes, moved towards the door without a word. Olivia thought she saw him stagger as he went, but then Olivia's own brain was reeling, so that the very ground seemed to heave beneath her.

The door opened, the door closed, footsteps sounded in the hall, then on the gravel without, and she knew that she was alone—alone with her misery and her degradation. And no sooner did she know it than, with an abrupt relaxation of the energy of indignation which had upheld her hitherto, she sank back into her chair, conscious of nothing but that she had endured till she could endure no more.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. WATERS FINDS OUT.

MEANTIME Mrs. Waters, closely muffled in veil and shawl, was slowly pacing up and down a solitary strip of highway near one of the gates of Egerton Park, being the most unfrequented part of the road leading thence to the Laurels. As she had told *Emmy*, she wished to see her broth-

er alone (at Nidbourne *Emmy's* vigilance had made it difficult for her to exchange with him in private more than a few words at a time), and she felt that she would be able to speak to him with less danger of interruption out of doors than in her own house. Then she had an important fact to communicate to him—the unavoidable admission of *Emmy* into the secret of his identity—a fact which might be necessary to explain any change observable in the girl's manner towards him, and which Mrs. Waters consequently wished him to know if possible beforehand.

She had waited thus some time, and began to fear that she would after all not find the desired opportunity that day, for the shades of the winter evening were already rapidly falling, and she understood that the interview between the newly reunited lovers could hardly fail to be a long one. At last, just as she was getting tired of waiting, and was about resigning herself to return home with the object of her walk unfulfilled, she saw the figure of a man coming down the road from the direction of Egerton Park. He was still at some distance, but in a moment she knew her brother's gait, and went forward with quickened pace to meet him. Apparently he must have recognized her too, for as she drew nearer she saw him advancing with long eager strides which showed him to have some reason for making great haste.

But no, he had not seen her—he did not see her even when, throwing back her veil, she went up with extended hand to greet him—but hastened onward without even turning his head in her direction.

"Why, Harry!" she said, seeing that he was about to pass her without recognition.

He started, and, coming to an abrupt halt, looked round, but with a perplexed air which showed that even now he did not very clearly know who had called him.

"Harry!" she said again; then, suddenly struck by a certain haggard vacant look about him which in the gathering obscurity she had not yet noticed, she added anxiously: "What is the matter? Are you ill? Oh! Harry, you know me, surely?"

"Agnes! Oh yes! I know you. But why have you stopped me?"

"You are ill!" she cried, laying her hand on his arm with an impulse of terrified affection.

"Ill—I don't know—perhaps; I am not very well. But I must go on now."

"Go on! What do you want to do? Where are you going?"

"I don't know—somewhere—I will write to you."

"Harry! stop!" she cried imploringly, for he had disengaged himself from her as he spoke.

"What is it? what has happened? what—"

"I will write," he repeated.

And, with a wave of his hand, he was once more striding forward on his way.

She made a few uncertain steps after him, but he was already far beyond her reach, and presently had disappeared from view altogether behind a corner of the road.

The poor lady was ready to faint with agitation and alarm. What was the matter? Was he mad? The wildness of his words, of his gestures, of his whole manner almost seemed to suggest it. Or was it possible that any external cause— He had just come from Egerton House;

could it be that something had happened there? Olivia was ill perhaps, or dead, or had proved fickle, or possibly— He could not have told Olivia any thing, surely! Oh! what could it all be? And how was it possible to wait without knowing, or without going mad herself with the uncertainty?

She looked round with an instinctive seeking for help out of an agony of suspense which she felt to be unendurable. There, hardly farther off than her brother had been when first she saw him, were the gray walls and overhanging trees of Egerton Park—the place whence he had come in such wild excitement, the place where certainly something must be known by some one as to the cause of that excitement. Why, then, that was the place for her to have her doubts set at rest! And no sooner had the idea occurred to her than she hastened blindly forward, with no thought of the difficulty of knowing how to frame and to whom to address her inquiries, with no thought of any thing save her brother's pale face and choking disjointed words.

With that face and those words haunting her memory and ringing in her ears, she reached the gate of Egerton Park and made her way up the avenue. Presently she found herself at the door of the house waiting for admission, and for the first time realized the necessity of not allowing her emotion to betray her.

"Can I see Miss Egerton?" she asked as calmly as she could of the servant who answered her summons.

"Yes, ma'am; will you please to walk this way? Miss Egerton is quite alone," said the man, who had happened to see Mr. Graham leave the house, and knew that this was a visitor whom his mistress always made welcome.

With faltering steps she followed him to the well-known door of Olivia's favorite sitting-room, which he flung open, announcing:

"Mrs. Waters."

There was a quick rustle of drapery as of some one making a sudden change of position. It was nearly dark by this time, but from that sound and a transient glimpse she had caught as the door was opened, the visitor could almost have believed that Olivia had been sitting with her face buried in her hands. But, however that may have been, Olivia was sitting erect enough now.

Mrs. Waters was fully alive at length to the difficulty of her task. How was she to set about her interrogations, at the same time concealing the depth of the personal interest which prompted them? But she was there, and it was necessary to say something—the more necessary as Olivia, apparently failing to recognize her in that uncertain light, had merely turned her face towards the door inquiringly, without making any attempt at welcome.

"Miss Egerton!" began Mrs. Waters as soon as the servant had withdrawn, and she made a hesitating step forward.

Olivia started up from her chair; it was evident that if she had previously had any doubt as to who the visitor might be, she had none now.

"You!" she exclaimed.

In that one syllable was concentrated such fire of mingled scorn and bitterness that Mrs. Waters *knew at once that all was over.*

For a while there was a silence in the room as of death, and then Olivia asked sternly:

"What do you want here? Are you not satisfied with the wrong you have done me, that you come to insult me with this intrusion?"

"The wrong I have done you!" said Mrs. Waters faintly.

"Yes, or helped your brother Harold Maxwell to do me, if you like it better. It is much the same."

As the brother's name reached the sister's ears, it thrilled through her as with an electric shock.

"You know, then?" she stammered. "You know that—that—"

"I know every thing," said Olivia haughtily.

Mrs. Waters became so giddy that she had to cling to a chair for support.

"Every thing! Do you really mean it? Every thing!"

"Yes, I really mean it, every thing—that your brother is a forger and a thief, and that I have been the weakest, blindest fool who ever fell into the hands of an accomplished professional—"

"Oh!" broke in Mrs. Waters with a cry of pain.

Olivia looked at her scornfully.

"What is the matter? Are you afraid that I shall try to punish him? You may set your mind at rest; I am too proud—too weak and silly, perhaps I ought to say—to expose my own imbecility to the world for the mere sake of being revenged. The secret is safe with me; if that is what you came about, you may go away quite satisfied."

Mrs. Waters answered nothing—only stood as though thunderstruck, and Olivia, after waiting a moment, resumed:

"It seems to me that every thing has been said that it can possibly be necessary to say between us—now or at any future time, I hope you understand. I wish you good-evening."

She fixed her eyes on the drooping form before her coldly and severely, and with stately step and erect bearing passed from the room.

Mrs. Waters, left alone, bowed her head in a very agony of despair.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NEWS TOLD AT THE LAURELS.

How Mrs. Waters reached home that day she herself hardly knew. All the way nothing was present to her mind but the image of her brother, haggard and half-delirious as she had seen him last; and she was scarcely conscious of where she was or whither she was going. But she knew the road by heart, and, instinctively following it, arrived at her own door just as night was closing in.

No sooner had she entered than she made straight for the library—the room where Austin was generally wont to spend the hour before dinner reading newspapers, or revising plans and estimates.

He was there now, sitting before the fire with a newspaper in his hand, which however he was not just then studying, but held hanging loosely downward, while his eyes were turned thoughtfully towards the blaze. Mrs. Waters shut the door, and, having glanced cautiously round the

well-lighted room to assure herself that he was quite alone, made a step forward as though about to speak. But in the mean while, disturbed by the noise she had made in entering, he looked round, and, before she had time to say any thing, began impatiently:

"Is that you, Agnes? Where on earth have you been? I thought you were never coming, and I have been wanting so to speak to you. Come here. Make haste; I tell you I have something to speak to you about."

"What is it?" she asked feverishly, for she thought he was going to tell her something about her brother.

"Look here—this confounded paper—not that it is any use to mind what such rascals say, of course, for they'll say any thing to fill up, but it worries a man, for all that. Look here—this paragraph."

He thrust the paper into her hand, pointing to a particular passage. She looked hurriedly; her mind was so full of her brother that, without considering probabilities, she could only imagine that her attention was being called to some statement concerning him—something which, seen by Olivia, had led to the fatal discovery of that day.

But her eyes only wandered helplessly among a tangle of words which for her had not the slightest meaning, interspersed here and there with unfamiliar names and unintelligible figures.

"Don't you see it?" cried Austin fretfully. "Here, I tell you—have you no eyes?"

He pointed again, and then she saw that the paragraph to which he was directing her attention was the following, inserted in the midst of a column headed "Monetary and Commercial:"

"We have pleasure in being authorized to announce that the unfavorable reports which prevailed last week as to the condition of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company are entirely devoid of foundation. The conspicuous union of prudence and vigor which characterizes the administration of this undertaking, no less than the well-known wealth of some of its principal shareholders, constitutes a sufficient guaranty for the entire fallaciousness of all sinister rumors."

"Haven't you read it yet?" demanded Austin gruffly, noticing perhaps the listless look with which his wife's eyes rested on these lines.

"About the Anglo-Cosmopolitan?" she said, with a mechanical attempt to humor him. "Yes, dear, very satisfactory, is it not? The unfavorable reports are not true, you see."

"Satisfactory! are you a fool? Confound it! who thought that there were any unfavorable reports at all? Of course I know very well they are not true—that's no news."

"Certainly, dear."

"And don't you go thinking I care much what those lying papers say, one way or another—they'll put in any thing for money, and that's just a kind of thing I could fancy the editor making up out of his own head if the column wasn't long enough. But it's a damned infernal shame they should be allowed to go on so—that's what I complain of."

"Austin," broke out Mrs. Waters, no longer

able to restrain her impatience, "I have something to say to you—something very particular. I have just seen Harry."

Austin's face did not grow any brighter at the intelligence.

"What! he has come back, then?"

"Yes; he wrote to me this morning, and I went towards Egerton House to try to meet him. And I did meet him, Austin; and oh! if you could only have seen how he looked! He would not stop to speak, but I knew at once that something must have happened."

"Something happened! what? Speak out—what is the matter?"

"And I went on to Egerton House, and I saw Miss Egerton, and—oh! it kills me to think of it. It is all over between them; she has found out who he is, and—"

"Found out!" articulated Austin in a choking voice. His eyes glared at her, so that they seemed ready to drop from their sockets, while his chest heaved with quick convulsive gasps which made her fear to see him fall to the ground from sheer want of breath.

"No, no, not that," she protested hastily—"not that, I do assure you. Only that he is my brother—indeed, indeed that is all."

"Is that all really?" he said, and seemed to grow a shade calmer.

"Yes, really it is, and if you could but hear the cruel bitter things— She hates him as much as ever she used to love him, I am sure. And he—ah! I believe he has gone away to die."

"He has gone away, then?" asked Austin, with what appeared to be an eager catching at the words.

"Yes, he has gone away, and oh! so wretched as he is! If you had only seen him, Austin! you would feel for him as I do. He loved her so dearly, and now to be hated and despised—"

"It was all your fault, Agnes. Why did you ever let them come together? I knew from the first it could bring no good."

"What would you have had me do? I could not come between him and his happiness—you would not have wished me, surely. Ah! Austin, you have spoken unkindly sometimes, but I know you have never meant it; I know you have never forgotten how much—"

"Of course not, of course not—how could I? And I am sure any thing I thought really calculated to promote his happiness I would have made every sacrifice in my power—"

"I know you would, dear Austin, I know it. Oh yes! you have always loved him, always remembered what he has done for you, as he remembered what you had done for him—always, however vexed and harassed you have sometimes been with your own troubles. And you are sorry for him now that he is so miserable—ah! I see you are."

"Nobody could be sorrier, I am sure. Only I always said—"

"Austin," she went on quickly, for she had reached the point she had been aiming at throughout—"do you know what I have been thinking? I have been thinking that it is our duty to go and tell Miss Egerton every thing."

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed, grasping her almost savagely by the arm. "Every thing! what do you mean?"

Her heart sunk within her as she saw his

fierce excited look, but she made shift to answer with external calmness.

"I mean what I say—every thing. Ah! for his sake who has done so much for you—"

He gnashed his teeth, and tightened his hold on her arm so that she nearly cried out with the pain.

"Never. Do you hear me? Never, never, never!"

"Austin, dear Austin—"

"What! you call me dear, and you want me to tell the world—"

"Only her, Austin, only her. Ah! think a little of him—"

"Think of me: do you want to kill me—do you want me to kill myself? Only her! only all Chorcombe, you mean—only all the world; it would come to the same thing. After all I have gone through! I tell you, no—it shall not be—never—do you hear me—do you?"

He looked at her in a way that made her tremble for him as she saw, and, understanding that all further persuasion would be useless, she hastened to allay as far as might be the storm she had raised.

"If this is how you feel, I will say no more," she rejoined soothingly, and yet with a certain severity of manner which, strive as she would, she could not quite suppress. "I have proposed what I thought was an act of justice, but—"

"Justice! Was it my fault he came here? was it my fault he came back to England at all? Did I want to see him, do you think? And because he chooses to run his head against a wall, am I to suffer—"

"I will say no more—surely that may content you. Oh! Austin, try—"

But a new idea had just occurred to him, disturbing him so violently that she might as well have spoken to the raging sea or wind.

"Perhaps you have told her already!" he cried, almost with a shriek.

"No, I have not, upon my honor. Oh! Austin, you may believe me, indeed you may—I am too great a coward to be so ready to tell what it breaks my heart even to think of."

"He has told her then—it is all the same."

"He has not, I swear he has not. Do you not know him better? He has promised, and he never broke a promise yet."

"Yes, he has promised, I know that," muttered Austin, evidently somewhat tranquilized by the argument—"and promised so that he could not break his word without being the greatest villain alive. But why did he put himself in the way of breaking it? That's what I want to be told. Why did he come—"

"He has gone away now," interrupted the wife bitterly; "will not that satisfy you?"

"If I were sure he really were gone; if I were sure—But he will come back again, confound him—he will come back again."

She looked at him very coldly; more coldly perhaps than ever she had done in her life before. She was thinking of her brother and of the circumstances under which she had seen him last, and for the time forgot all her compassion for one who could speak of him with so little sympathy.

Austin probably saw something of her feelings, for he resumed with a slightly shamefaced air: "There, I didn't mean quite to say that; I can't stop to consider every word. You know

very well how I look on him—just like my own brother, I'm sure, as of course I ought. But when you think of all I have gone through, you can not wonder that I should be afraid—"

"You have nothing to be afraid of," she answered quietly. "He is gone, and will not trouble you by coming back again—not even if he lives," she added more harshly.

He drew a long breath, then, after a pause, went on with new anxiety:

"And what will people think when they hear that we have had him with us—under our roof—a person whom every body knows to have been accused—"

"Very likely they would only think you a good brother-in-law for having forgiven him," said Mrs. Waters; and this time she spoke in tones which sounded almost sarcastic in their suppressed bitterness. "But you need not be afraid of that either; Miss Egerton expressly told me that for her own sake she would not expose him."

"Why, then, it may all be as though this had never happened?" said Austin, his brow perceptibly clearing.

"So far as you are concerned, yes."

She glanced up at him as though about to add something very cutting, but he was looking so worn and gaunt and tremulous, so altogether unlike the hale hearty man who had been the husband of her youth, that she could not find it in herself to reproach him.

"You have nothing to be afraid of," she repeated, and then, feeling her eyes filling with tears which were no longer to be restrained, she hurried towards the door. She knew that there was no comfort for her in that room.

He did not attempt to detain her, and immediately afterwards she found herself, with a full heart, on her way up stairs.

She had reached the upper landing, and was pausing at the door of her own chamber, when she saw coming along the dimly-lighted corridor a slight tripping figure which for years she had always associated with the idea of support and consolation. She had never needed support and consolation more than she did just now, and instinctively she waited for the little figure to come up.

"Is that you, darling?" she said; but indeed she knew very well who it was without asking.

"Why, mamma! What! you have only just come in? I am ready dressed for dinner, you see, and going down to the drawing-room. You won't be long, will you?"

"No. But—but don't go down yet, dear. Come into my room for a few minutes first."

The poor mother felt a craving for sympathy that was absolutely irresistible.

"Certainly, mamma dear," and Emmy followed her mother into the room with great alacrity. She was in good spirits, or at least felt that she ought to be in good spirits, which in some cases amounts to much the same thing. And certainly she could not fail to feel that she ought to be in good spirits after the implied declaration of love which she had that day received from Randal Egerton.

"Emmy, darling, come and kiss me," said Mrs. Waters, sinking exhausted into a chair as soon as the door was closed. "I am very, very miserable."

"Mamma! dear mamma!" cried Emmy, running up and throwing her arms round her mother's neck. "My own sweet mamma, what is the matter?"

"I am so glad I was obliged to tell you what I did once, Emmy," murmured Mrs. Waters, quite clinging to the plump little arms cast so protectingly round her; "it is such a comfort to be able to speak freely to you. Miss Egerton has found out about—about—you know what I mean, Emmy. Every thing is at an end, and oh! I am so unhappy."

Emmy felt a cold perspiration stand on her forehead as she heard. She thought of Randal, and the confession he had extorted from her during that pleasant walk home. Was it possible—

"Found out about—about Uncle Harold, do you mean? Oh! mamma, surely you must be mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken, I saw them both—first him, and then Miss Egerton. And oh! Emmy, he looked so wretched! I am afraid he will never get over it."

Emmy was in dreadful tribulation. Still it was utterly impossible that the discovery should be in the remotest degree due to any act of hers—utterly. He never could have betrayed her—he who had looked so tenderly into her eyes and bid her cast out fear, he who loved her with such evident depth of passionate devotion, he with whom her destiny was henceforth inseparably linked. But naturally she could not help being very much concerned.

"How did it happen?" she asked in a shaking voice. "Did any one tell her? But then no one could have known. How can it have happened?"

"I have no idea," said Mrs. Waters mournfully. "Whether he may have said something about his past life to make her suspect, and then from one thing to another—and yet I can't think that likely, either. You never breathed a word about it to any one, Emmy, I am certain?"

"Oh mamma!" said Emmy. It was all that she was able to answer for the moment, but it was a sufficient answer for her mother, in whose ears the exclamation sounded quite reproachfully.

"Oh! of course I was quite sure it could not be through you, my darling."

"You may be quite sure indeed, mamma," said Emmy earnestly. The more she reflected, the more certain she became that it was not and could not be through her, and she felt that she might look her mother in the face and tell her so with a clear conscience. Why, it was not two hours yet since Randal had parted from her with that farewell assurance of fidelity and love, and that farewell pressure of the hand which, without any spoken assurance at all, would have been a sufficient pledge of his feelings towards her—not two hours. So that if he had been Olivia's informant he must have gone straight from her presence to Egerton House, must have left her with the express purpose of betraying her. It was really very satisfactory to be provided with such an answer to any doubts of his prudence which, had the discovery been made a few days or weeks later, might otherwise have arisen in her mind.

"Poor dear mamma," she resumed caressingly, having completely restored her own self-satisfaction by this course of reasoning, "I am so very sorry for you."

"I knew you would be, dear child."

"Yes, and for him too," rejoined Emmy generously, for the sight of her mother's grief had thoroughly softened her—"for him too. I am sure he was quite a changed character, and I believe I should have got to like him very much in time, and really to look upon him almost as an uncle, though of course most people—Oh! mamma," she exclaimed, breaking off, for a horrid idea had just presented itself, "what will be thought of us for having forgiven him so far, for having actually had him in our house and introduced him to our friends? Oh! I am afraid the remarks we shall hear will be quite terrible."

Yes, and the remarks would reach the ears of Randal Egerton and his family; that was worse of all. They could make no difference to his feelings, of course, but he could not fail to be very much annoyed.

"You think of that too?" said Mrs. Waters with a strange smile. "You need not be afraid, neither you nor your father. Miss Egerton has promised to keep our secret for us, and he has gone away, never to trouble you again. You have nothing to fear—all the misery, all the disgrace is borne by him alone."

Emmy felt considerable relief at hearing that this was the case, though, observing that her mother had spoken rather bitterly, she did not exactly like to express it.

"I am sure I am as sorry for him as any one can be," she said with an air of apology. "But you know, mamma dear, it is really only natural—"

"Oh yes! I dare say it is natural enough—of course it is," assented Mrs. Waters, but still, it appeared to Emmy, somewhat coldly. "There you can go down stairs now, Emmy; I shall be better alone."

"You are not angry with me, mamma?"

"Oh no! why should I, poor child? But I shall be better alone—indeed."

It was manifest that Mrs. Waters, notwithstanding the craving for sympathy she had felt a few minutes before, really did wish to be left to herself now; so Emmy, having first kissed her mother's cheek very tenderly, tripped softly out of the room. She was not sorry herself to be alone again; she had been very much disturbed by the intelligence she had just heard, and now gladly let her thoughts revert to him whom she instinctively regarded as her chief comforter. Ah! how delightful to have some one to whom she could unbosom all her griefs, all her anxieties—some one of whose warm and undivided sympathy she could be quite sure! And such a one she would shortly have by her side—arousing in his true character to all the world; had he not promised to speak to her father, and had he not promised in so many words not to put off long? Oh yes! he would come very, very soon and what loving comfort he would pour into her ear, what tender reproaches for the momentary doubt of him that she had felt!

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUSPENSE.

"Is there nothing for me?" asked Mrs. Waters anxiously the next morning, when the ter-bag was laid as usual before her husband.

"Nothing this morning."

A look of intense disappointment fell on the poor wife's countenance. She had been racked all night with suspense concerning her brother, the memory of whose white face and distraught bloodshot eyes had hardly for an instant been absent from her thoughts, and she had looked forward with feverish impatience to the morning in the hope of receiving the tidings which he had promised. And now she was condemned to wait another day without knowing how he was bearing his misery, or if it had not crushed him altogether—in ignorance even of his whereabouts. She understood that she could hardly have expected news from him so soon, but the idea of having to wait longer for it was a kind of torture.

Emmy saw something of her mother's distress, and felt for it very deeply. She was perfectly sure that it could not have been brought about by any fault of hers, but still she could not help being a little self-reproachful in remembering that she had permitted herself to speak to a third person of a secret the importance of which Mrs. Waters's pale cheeks and care-worn look impressed upon her more forcibly than ever it had been impressed before. She felt that she had, however harmlessly, committed a breach of confidence; and in spite of her conviction that under the exceptional circumstances of the case no evil had come, or by any possibility could come, of her imprudence, she was perhaps more moved by the sight of her mother's anxiety than she would have been if her conscience had been quite clear. So she sat unusually silent and depressed, leaving the room, as soon as breakfast was over, expressly in order to give her parents an opportunity of discussing the matter in her absence.

The opportunity so considerably made was, however, not profited by. The name of Harold Maxwell was probably uppermost in Austin's mind as it was in his wife's—indeed her visible suffering must alone have sufficed to remind him of it—but it was not mentioned by either. He made a few comments on sundry items of news in that morning's paper, and, among other things, remarked how very satisfactory it was to have such good accounts of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan from Frisby; for that gentleman had looked in last night, and laughed to scorn the idea of unfavorable reports having been in circulation. And Mrs. Waters agreed that it was very satisfactory indeed, but said not a word to show that any other subject was in her thoughts.

The truth was, she was conscious that on the one subject which just now lay next her heart her husband and herself were out of sympathy, and that it was therefore best avoided between them. But this consciousness was in itself a serious aggravation of her wretchedness. They had been married more than five-and-twenty years, and this was the first time that she had been obliged to keep a grief to herself from such a cause.

She was able to speak more freely when Austin had gone out for the day, and she was alone with her daughter again. But though Emmy was very kind and caressing—even kinder and more caressing than usual—Emmy evidently did not wish to say much on this topic of her uncle Harold, and not much, therefore, was said. *As may be supposed, the topic for Emmy was*

not altogether a satisfactory one; besides which she was too much taken up with her own concern to be exactly in a sympathizing frame of mind. She was as sorry for her mother's unhappiness as she could be for any thing just now, but she was all day in a state of nervous excitement and expectation which made her incapable of fixing thoughts on any idea save one for two minutes together. Every sound at the bell, every distant footstep out of doors, sent all her blood rushing to her heart. Was he coming to claim that high-born lover of hers to whom her was already virtually plighted, coming to do her homage openly at her feet, and bring her comfort in the prospect of so brilliant an inheritance? He had said he would come soon, he would keep his word. He would not hurt her and insult her, and make her ashamed of herself for having thought of him; he was not a Thwaites—no, indeed, but somebody very different.

Thus she continued waiting and watching day after day; and when the evening approached and the expected suitor had not made his appearance, her excitement hardly abated. He had come to-day, but that made it only the more certain that he would come to-morrow.

The morrow arrived, but the morrow was a repetition of the previous day. In the meantime there was the same eager inquiry on Mrs. Waters's part for a letter, the same look of disappointment, only increased and intensified, on finding that there was none; and on Emmy's the same feeling of remorse and self-reproach (perhaps a little increased too) at sight of her mother's grief, merging, as the day went on, into the same straining expectation on her own part, the same intent listening for slight sounds, the same waiting and watching, accompanied by the same certainty that she could not wait and watch long. She was sure that he might trust him; she could not doubt, remembering his parting words and his parting promises. A thousand things might have happened to him; the days were so short and the road so bad—and then he had not positively fixed a time; he had only said "before long." He would not, could not let herself be discouraged, and when that day drew to a close without his coming, she was still reasonable in her impatience and once more looked forward to the morrow.

But another morrow came, and another, and, in dreary succession, yet after these, and still no Randal Egerton. She watched and listened and counted the hours as they rolled on, and each new flash of hope only died out in new disappointment. For he passed and re-passed, but none of them was the man from time to time a summons sounded at the bell, but his name was not announced.

She grew weary and sick with waiting, kept conning and re-conning all that had passed at their last interview, as her only solace against absolute despair. For still she did despair—how could she, with the circumstances of that interview fresh in her memory? A man worthy the name of man could not be so base as to betray her, and was it possible to suspect that he could be—he, Randal Egerton, one of the first gentlemen in the county? And then, while it was out of the question to imagine that he had deliberately broken his

ise, there were so many causes which might account for unavoidable delay in its fulfillment. He might be ill, perhaps (ah! how grievous to think upon!), or some member of his family might be ill (not quite so bad that), or he might have been unexpectedly called away on business, or— Oh yes! there was only one thing which she might be quite sure of, and that was, that he could not be to blame. But though she kept on comforting herself so bravely, she grew every day more anxious and depressed, every day somehow more self-reproachful at sight of her mother's anxiety and depression.

For while Emmy had been waiting thus in vain, Mrs. Waters had been waiting in vain too. The expected letter from her brother had not come, and she was left ignorant where he had gone or where he intended to go—whether he was in health or sickness, whether he was alive or dead.

Perhaps it was because she was older and more experienced, perhaps because her temperament was naturally less sanguine; but waiting went a great deal harder with Mrs. Waters than with her daughter. While Emmy was always buoying herself up with bright expectations of what was going to happen, always comforting herself under disappointment with renewed hope, Mrs. Waters was a prey to the darkest fears, which when she tried to banish them only pressed on her more heavily and more persistently. He had promised to write, and, even without promising, would he not certainly have done so had he been alive and well? But he had not written—what, then, could she think? And he had looked so ill when she saw him last; even before there had been time for a letter to reach her she had been afraid of something happening. Something *had* happened, then—and what?

The most horrible visions were perpetually haunting her—of her brother tossing on a bed of sickness and delirium, dying perhaps in the midst of rough uncaring strangers—and even this was not the worst fear which tormented her. He had looked so wild and distracted as he parted from her, almost like one already irresponsible for his actions; who knew but that in his frenzy and his despair he might have been tempted—She dared not fully form the thought even in her own mind, and yet she could not keep it from constantly recurring.

To make her misery greater, she was unable, lest the motive of her interest should be suspected, to take any effectual steps towards setting her suspense at rest by inquiry. She had indeed the pain of hearing a good many rumors regarding Mr. Graham's sudden disappearance, which, with the lovers' quarrel that was its presumed cause, was naturally enough for a few days the theme of all the gossips of Chorcombe. But amidst all the idle talk and speculation to which she was condemned to listen, hardly any thing definite reached her ears, and what little did was not of a reassuring nature. It seemed pretty certain that he had left the town by railway, for he had been seen waiting at the station by a servant of the inn where he had put up in the morning. So far this information might have been satisfactory, as showing some coherency of thought and purpose; but when it was further said that this same servant had asked him what was to be done with his luggage left at the inn, that he had

answered with a promise to send for it next day and that he had as yet failed to do so, Mrs. Waters could not but feel her worst apprehension strengthened and confirmed. As the days followed each other, gradually swelling into weeks and still she heard nothing, such intense anxiety took possession of her mind that it began to be relief to her rather than a disappointment to be told each morning that there were no tidings. She could not now imagine any tidings that were not bad, and looked with dismay on every letter and every paper that came to the house lest it should contain the intelligence which she dreaded. Thus she went on, fearing more every day and growing every day more and more miserable.

And meanwhile poor Emmy, though still hoping rather than fearing, went on growing more miserable also.

There was not a great deal said between mother and daughter at this time; the hearts of both were too full for either to feel inclined for much conversation. But Mrs. Waters noticed that Emmy was unwontedly subdued in spirits, and ascribing the change altogether to sympathy with her own distress, was very much touched by it and even comforted. It was pleasant to believe that there was one person in the world who felt for her, and in some degree with her, in her sorrow and such a belief she could not entertain concerning her husband. It has been said that she had an instinct at the first that Austin was out of sympathy with her on the subject of her solicitude and this instinct went on gathering force as time advanced. In proportion as she became more terrified and unhappy, it seemed to her that he grew more and more reassured; and at last she fancied that she could almost measure her own reason for apprehension by the standard of his comparative tranquillity. This being the case she scrupulously avoided saying a word to him on the matter, and when from time to time he pent-up feelings forced their way to the surface it was always her daughter whom she chose as confidante.

"Dear Emmy," she said once when the girl was looking more than usually dejected, "how good you are to me! You have every thing to make you glad, and yet just because you see me grieving you are quite miserable. You must not be too unhappy on my account, my darling."

"I am very sorry for you of course, mamma," said Emmy, wincing a good deal as she thought how much less her mother's suffering had to do with her depression than her mother seemed to believe. "And I would give any thing, I'm sure, to see you happy again—that I would—any thing in the world. But I believe you are making yourself uneasy without cause, mamma dear, indeed I do. Take my word for it, it will all come right."

Perhaps these words of comfort were partly addressed to herself as well as to her mother. But Mrs. Waters never thought of that.

"It could not all come right," she answered mournfully, "unless he could be again what he was once to Miss Egerton. But if I could only think that he was alive, if I could only believe that he did not part from me that day to go to his death—"

"Oh! mamma, that is surely—"

"If you had seen him, Emmy, if you had

seen him, you would understand why I am afraid. He was scarcely in his right mind even then."

"But, mamma, it is so much more likely that he has only left the country. Oh! depend upon it, in a few weeks you will be hearing from some place abroad—"

"A few weeks! And how am I to wait? Oh! child, you little know what I suffer! The suspense is killing me. If only I could try to find out, if only I had an idea of the direction he had taken, so that I might follow or make inquiries! But to have to sit here and wait and do nothing while he is dying perhaps—it will drive me mad."

"Oh! mamma pet, pray, pray don't talk so," expostulated Emmy. She did not add that her uncle Harold was scarcely worthy of being the object of such extreme solicitude, but the idea certainly passed through her mind.

"I can not help it, Emmy. I am miserable—so miserable that sometimes I think I am half mad already. All this came so suddenly, and I was so happy just before—every now and then I have a feeling that it can not have happened at all, that I have only been dreaming. How can she have found out? It seems impossible when one thinks of it, does it not?"

"It is very strange, no doubt," said Emmy, wincing a little more this time. "But he is so good now that I suppose he must have felt it his duty to tell her how wicked he had been once; don't you think that was it, mamma?"

"That he told her himself, do you mean? You know nothing about it," said Mrs. Waters, rather more peremptorily than usual.

"Of course I can't say for certain, mamma, but I really think that when one considers how much it must have been on his conscience—"

"You know nothing about it," cried Mrs. Waters again; and then, somewhat abruptly, as though the conversation had suddenly become more painful than she could bear, she rose and left the room.

Emmy was a good deal surprised at finding Mrs. Waters reject thus decisively and almost angrily an explanation which in the girl's eyes seemed so eminently probable and natural. How blindly attached her mother was to that erring brother of hers, to be sure!—it looked sometimes as though she almost forgot that he had ever been guilty. But Emmy did not forget his guilt by any means, and, pondering it deeply in her own mind, became more and more impressed with the probability of her theory. What could be more likely than that her uncle Harold, possessing doubtless many good qualities, and constantly oppressed by the memory of his crime, should have been stung by Miss Egerton's generosity into making a full and unreserved confession? And then how could the truth have reached Miss Egerton's ears in any other way? Her mother, perhaps, if she knew all, might, blinded by morbid suspicion, imagine that Randal had told the terrible secret; but Emmy, with her eyes clear and wide open, saw plainly that this could not be. He was a gentleman, not a perjurer and a villain, and none but a perjurer and a villain could have been guilty of so foul an abuse of confidence. Why, look at John Thwaites, who had used her so badly; she might have trusted him with a thousand secrets and he would never have betrayed her—never; let him be as angry as he

would. Yes, there was that good in him certainly. And was it likely that Randal Egerton, who loved her and was a gentleman— Ah no!—a thousand times no. And he did love her; of course he loved her—there was no more doubt of that than there was of his being a gentleman. He had not come yet as he had promised, but the very length of the delay proved that something unusual must have happened to cause it. Even if that memorable walk had never taken place, it would have been his business to call by this time to pay his respects after the party; almost every other gentleman invited had done so, and certainly he would not have omitted so important a social duty till now under any ordinary circumstances. There was thus evidently some extraordinary detaining cause in operation, but the cause, whatever it was, must inevitably cease sooner or later, and then, as inevitably, he would come. Oh yes! he would come, she might look for him from day to day. But day after day passed, and she was left still hoping, as her mother was left still fearing.

Nearly three weeks had been spent in this weary waiting, and it was already within three or four days of Christmas, when one morning Mrs. Waters, watching intently as usual while her husband opened his letters, saw him, as he unfolded one of them, suddenly turn pale. Her own heart grew cold within her; had the dreaded announcement come at last?

"What is it?" she asked faintly.

But before there was time for any answer to come, the letter had fallen from his hands, and with a cry he sank back helpless in his chair.

"Papa!" shrieked Emmy. "Are you ill?"

But Mrs. Waters's alarm was not just now for her husband, and, staggering forward, she lifted the fallen letter, and fastened her eyes on it as though she expected, as in truth she did, that it was to decide a question of life or death.

The letter, however, contained tidings altogether different from any she had looked for—so different indeed that it was some time before she could so much as understand what it was about. When at last, finding that its contents were not those she had expected, she grew sufficiently calm to wonder what they really might be, she saw that they ran as follows:

"1 Blue-Bag Buildings, Bedford Row,
London, W. C., December 20th.

"DEAR SIR,—Finding, from documents now in my possession, that you are the most important shareholder in the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, as well as one of the few directors whose address is at present known, I feel it my duty as solicitor appointed by the Board to acquaint you of the existence of certain very painful rumors which there is too much reason to believe well-founded, and which it may be more agreeable to your feelings to be first apprised of through some other medium than that of the public press. In the unexpected absence, it is believed on the Continent, of the chairman and secretary of the company, it is impossible at this moment to enter into any full statement of particulars, but as far as can be judged, from the present aspect of affairs, it appears only too probable that the shareholders will have to be called upon for the greater part, if not the whole, of the

sums standing over on their respective shares, amounting to five times the paid-up capital.

"Trusting that this communication may reach you in time to avert any unpleasant surprise, I remain, dear sir, yours truly,

"JOSEPH SHARPLES."

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Waters when at last she understood, and, turning towards her husband, who was still leaning back prostrate and half fainting in his chair, she added, with a touch of severity in her voice: "Be a man, Austin; think how much worse news than this we might have heard."

"Worse! what could be worse?" he murmured, and his hands clenched themselves with spasmodic yet feeble violence. "Don't you see what he says about the money standing over—five times the amount? We shall be ruined—ruined outright."

"Ruined!" ejaculated Emmy, and in her turn caught up the letter, which her mother had now laid down.

"And if we are, we must learn to bear it," said Mrs. Waters calmly. "Austin, be brave; what good can this do?"

"Oh! my poor dear papa!" cried Emmy, after a glance at the letter, and rushed up to fling herself on her father's neck with a burst of sympathy the more demonstrative as she could not but think her mother strangely unfeeling.

"My poor dear papa! But oh! don't speak like that, papa darling; it can't be so bad as they think, I am sure it can't; the horrid man must be mistaken. And even if it was all true, papa, we couldn't be what you said we were—you know we couldn't. What! ruined, and the Beacon Bay railway going to be made—what can have put such a thing into your head?"

She had struck the right chord. He raised himself slightly in his chair, and a faint flush came to his cheek, as though his blood were beginning to resume its natural flow.

"Ah! to be sure—the Beacon Bay railway. Say that again, child, say that again."

"What, papa, had you actually forgotten? But you see now how safe we are—you see now, don't you? Why, if we had lost every farthing, Beacon Bay would make it all up to us, over and over again."

"Of course, of course," he cried, drawing her fondly to his side. "My own dear little girl! Why, Emmy, you are the cool-headed man of business to-day, and I am only the child."

"That dreadful letter upset you, papa, and no wonder," said Emmy, modestly parrying the compliment, though not at all insensible to it.

"But you see now, let the worst come to the worst, we have nothing to be afraid of. And perhaps the worst may not come to the worst either; perhaps you are not liable for any thing, or perhaps it is all a mistake together—who knows?"

Austin shook his head gloomily; he just understood enough of business not to see his way clearly to the adoption of this pleasant theory.

"Well, upon my word, I shouldn't wonder," persisted Emmy, who had too good a conceit just now of her own judgment to be easily put down.

"I don't see how it can be law that you should be robbed like that, and when you go to Mr. Fris-

by, I shan't be a bit surprised if he tells you the same."

"Frisby!" shouted Austin fiercely, and the name seemed to be a more effectual restorative than any thing that had gone before. "Frisby and do you think I am ever going near him again—that damned infernal villain who takes me over into putting my money in this vile swindle?"

"Did he really, papa?" said Emmy, who from what she had at different times heard had always been under the impression that it was her father who had talked over Mr. Frisby into admitting him to a valuable secret, "did he really? The he is a wicked, cheating creature who deserves any name you can give him—if it is true what this letter says, at least—and it will just serve him right to lose all your custom when you are rich again. But—"

"Yes, he will be sorry then—confound him, he will be sorry then," muttered Austin, and ground his teeth in vindictive triumph.

"But I can't believe it is true, papa; I can believe but what if you just go and show him that letter— You must show it to somebody you know, so perhaps you had better try his first."

Austin was silent for an instant. Yes, certainly so far Emmy was right—he must show that letter to somebody; he must consult with some professional adviser on the amount of his liability and the mode of meeting it, and the without delay. And who, save Frisby, was there to consult?

"I will go and see about it then. And if it turns out true, if it does— Damn the fellow I'll tell him what I think of him!" he concluded springing to his feet.

And so reviving was the idea of speaking his mind to his betrayer, if indeed he had been betrayed, that, without further time required for considering his purpose or steadying his nerves, he took leave of his wife and daughter on a straightway started for Mr. Frisby's, with a fiercer energy of demeanor which showed that for the present at least anger had galvanized him into new life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WORSE AND WORSE.

WHETHER or not this anger was altogether wholesome for him, Austin's visit to Mr. Frisby did not serve in any degree to allay it. He was kept waiting a long time without seeing an body but a clerk, who told him his master was particularly engaged just then with a client; and when at last his persistence was rewarded by sight of the lawyer himself, he did not learn anything satisfactory. Probably this was not the fault of Mr. Frisby, but rather of facts which were too strong for him, for nothing could have exceeded the urbanity of that gentleman's expressions of regret and surprise on hearing what had happened. Still, urbanity notwithstanding it did not seem that he had any thing to recommend or suggest, or even any consolation to offer beyond shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head, and saying he was very sorry.

"What! you mean to tell me I have not to do but to stand still and be robbed of

than a hundred thousand pounds?" said Austin, trembling, but as much with wrath as consternation.

"I am very sorry," said Mr. Frisby, rubbing his hands obsequiously, almost as though going through a form of washing them, "very sorry indeed; but I really do not see what else— You had upward of eleven hundred shares, if you recollect—eleven hundred and sixty I think was the exact number; and as you only paid a fifth part of the price down, it follows, of course, that if application for the residue is now made— A most unforeseen circumstance, I am sure, and regretted by no one more than myself."

"Silence, blackguard!" thundered Austin, and brought down his hand on the table in a paroxysm of rage which he could no longer bridle.

"Eh?" said Mr. Frisby, starting in innocent surprise. "Who were you alluding to, sir?"

"To the greatest villain unhung," retorted Austin furiously, and advanced his first so near the lawyer's face that there could no longer exist any doubt as to whom his words were intended for. "Scoundrel! you have done your best to ruin me, and it is not your fault if you have not succeeded."

Mr. Frisby retreated a few steps, looking very pale, but still retaining sufficient presence of mind to smile feebly as though in half-compassionate deprecation.

"If I were what you take me for, Mr. Waters," he said in rather a faint voice, "you could hardly address such language to me with impunity. But I know how to make allowances for mental suffering, and I will not take advantage of actionable violence into which you have been betrayed in a moment of weakness. I am sorry for you, sir, and therefore I can bear a great deal."

But Austin did not hear; perhaps it was as well that he did not, or he might have been tempted to make practical experiment of how much Mr. Frisby really could bear. He had already moved towards the door, and now, while he paused to open it, turned round to say:

"You are a liar and swindler and vagabond; and if I should be as rich as Croesus, not a brass farthing of my money shall ever find its way again into your pocket."

And, with this parting denunciation, he dashed out of the office, somewhat relieved by the thought of what he had said, but still fuming with passion to which no mere words could have given adequate vent.

His passion was so far useful that it served temporarily to stave off reflections which must otherwise have made that day a great deal darker to him than it was. He returned home far from despondent, and inclined rather to inveigh against Frisby than to brood on his own misfortunes. This comparatively sanguine mood continued even after his first anger had begun to cool—kept up partly by the cheering influence of Emmy's representations, partly, perhaps, by one or two visits which he found it necessary to pay to a certain cupboard in his library of which mention has been already made. Be this as it may, when he went to bed that night he had hardly given a serious thought to any difficulties that might be awaiting him in the future.

But with the earliest moment of waking next morning, the inevitable reaction set in. The idea of the sum of money which he would have

to make good was the first that presented itself with returning consciousness, and, in the absence of any strong counter-excitement, it seemed to crush him to the very earth. All elasticity both of body and mind was gone; he had not energy even to complain or bewail himself. As a matter of habit, he rose at the usual hour, and somehow or other got through the task of dressing; but when he entered the breakfast-room, it was with a worn, listless, half-abstracted air, which made his wife and daughter greet him in mournful silence, instinctively feeling that nothing they could say would do him good.

A heap of letters was awaiting him—so many that, if any trace of his usual sanguineness had been left, he would surely have hoped that one among them might contain something either to contradict the news of yesterday, or at least to modify its import. But no such hope occurred to him—no definite expectation indeed of any kind; and as he mechanically sat down to open his letters, it was with an utter want of interest in their contents.

The first which chanced to come to hand was not of a sort to lighten the oppression that weighed so heavily on his spirits. It was from Mr. Tovey, and began by stating with how much regret the writer had learned the calamity that had fallen on the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, in which undertaking he remembered to have heard Mr. Waters speak of being more or less interested. As he had the pen in his hand it would not perhaps be considered out of place if he took this opportunity of asking Mr. Waters what were his views with regard to the prosecution of the works at Beacon Bay and Chorcombe Lodge, and whether they were to be continued on the same scale as heretofore, and at the same rate of progress. He regretted that he had not yet had time to prepare an exact report of the expenses incurred since Mr. Waters's last cash installment, but they certainly were not less than eight thousand pounds; and as a very expensive stage was now being reached, he feared it would be requisite to ask Mr. Waters for immediate payment before the works could be proceeded with. He would forward an account, with full particulars, next day; but in the mean time, knowing Mr. Waters's anxiety that no avoidable delay should arise, had ventured to trouble him with this statement of what would at the least be necessary to defray expenses already incurred. An immediate answer would much oblige.

On reading this epistle, Austin's countenance grew, if possible, a shade blanker even than before. He made, however, no spoken comment, merely pushing the letter wearily across the table to his wife and daughter, and with slow automatic motion putting out his hand for the next. Perhaps he had a sort of idea now what that morning's voluminous correspondence might be about.

If he did make any guess on the subject, it was only too correct. Some of the letters he next opened began, like Mr. Tovey's, with a few words of respectful condolence on the now publicly announced collapse of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan; others, more astutely if not more delicately, ignored the topic altogether; but the burden of one and all was practically the same. First Mr.

D'Almayne, being in immediate want of funds without which he would be unable to execute a very costly commission just received, was compelled to ask Mr. Waters for the purchase-money of the valuable pictures the acquisition of which had, according to his wish, been made for the gallery at Chorcombe Lodge. Next, the carriage-builder, who had supplied the magnificent equipage so dear to Emmy's heart, had a large amount to make up, which unfortunately left him no choice but to trouble Mr. Waters with his little account; and then the upholsterer, who had received the order for the furnishing of the new house, thought it might be satisfactory to Mr. Waters to possess a memorandum of the outlay already made in furtherance of his views; while Mr. Jupp, the house-agent, suddenly found the owners of the Laurels pressing for the payment of the last half-year's rent. There were two or three other applications which it is not necessary to specify, but the upshot was, that Austin found himself called upon for sums the gross amount of which would wholly exhaust the balance of property left him by the failure of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan; and he knew that even these were far from representing all the demands which might be made on him. He read and laid down the last of the letters, still uttering no word, and then sat staring before him with a stolid fixity of gaze that spoke of something like despair.

There was silence among the family group for some time, broken at last by Emmy.

"Don't vex about it too much, papa dear. Beacon Bay will make it all right again in time, you know."

But things had come to such a pass with him that even the idea of Beacon Bay failed to bring comfort. He turned his eyes slowly towards the speaker, asking:

"And how am I to keep Beacon Bay if I owe already more than I am worth?"

Emmy made no answer; she knew not, in truth, what answer to make, this being a view of the case which had not yet occurred to her. Austin waited as though half expecting counsel, then, finding that she had none to give, let his head droop forward on his breast, and all was again silence.

The silence this time lasted longer than before, wife and daughter both fearing to make matters worse by futile attempts at consolation, and besides, he was evidently meditating. At length the fruit of his meditation disclosed itself, and, looking furtively from one to the other as if almost afraid of the effect of his own words, he said, in very low depressed accents, which, however, it manifestly cost him an effort to bring out at all:

"Suppose I were to go and speak to Podmore?"

"Oh! do, Austin, do," entreated Mrs. Waters, who would have made this very proposal long ago had she dared, and, save for the utter breakdown of spirit which it indicated, could have wished nothing better than that it should come from her husband himself.

"Mr. Podmore!" ejaculated Emmy in amazement; but an instant's reflection served to show her too that no wiser course could be adopted, and she joined her influence to that of her mother in recommending it.

Thus urged, Austin languidly gathered his let-

ters together, and, putting them into his pocket as part of the case to be consulted on, prepared to betake himself to Mr. Podmore's, setting out, however, with a slow lagging step, as different as possible from that with which he had started yesterday for Mr. Frisby's.

Poor Mrs. Waters and Emmy, left alone, spent a very miserable morning. It has been shown that they both had their private troubles quite apart from Austin's, but this made them only the less able to bear the anxiety which they could not but feel at sight of his bodily and mental suffering, to say nothing of their own threatened reverse of fortune. They spoke little to each other on this new subject of uneasiness, or indeed on any other, but sat waiting for what news the husband and father might bring back, in a suspense which increased with every half-hour of his absence. If he did not find some promise of hope and assistance where he had now gone to seek for it, what would become of them? Above all, what would become of him?

They had been sitting thus a long time, very dejectedly and drearily, when all at once a ring was heard at the visitors' bell which made both look up in some surprise, while to Emmy it caused a strange thrill of excited expectation. Who could it be? Her father was wont to re-enter the house by a back way, without ringing at all, and the weather was damp and foggy—by no means such as would be chosen by any caller not bound on special business. Was it, then, he at last?—brought in haste to her side by the news of the family misfortune—risen perhaps from a sick-bed to give her the comfort and support she so much needed? Ah! if it was—if it really was! When, on the opening of the house door, she heard the sound of manly footsteps in the hall, she felt actually afraid of looking up, lest, after all she had gone through, the excitement of seeing him enter should be more than she could bear.

Still, without looking up, she heard the footsteps draw nearer and nearer. They paused close outside the room; there was a sound as of the turning of a handle, and then through the tumult of her senses she heard the announcement:

"Mr. and Mrs. Elkins."

Poor Emmy! it was as though a bucketful of cold water had been dashed over her.

The new-comers could hardly have failed to gather from their reception that the shadow of some great calamity rested on the household, even if no reports of it had already reached them. Mrs. Waters was pale and care-worn, and went forward to meet them with a listless mournfulness of manner which she could not even attempt to conceal, while Emmy murmured a few inaudible words of greeting with a half-startled, half-vacant air, as though she did not very well know where she was or what she was doing. But Mr. and Mrs. Elkins were much too polite to appear to observe these symptoms, and went through the regular forms of salutation as if nothing had happened; then, still as if nothing had happened, sat down and launched into decorous small-talk about the weather.

When this subject was exhausted—and, Mrs. Waters and Emmy only answering in monosyllables, it could not be made to hold out very long—Mr. Elkins, after one or two gentle preliminar-

hems, looked round the room, and, with a slight appearance of embarrassment, remarked:

"Mr. Waters is out just now, I think the servant said?"

"He has gone to Mr. Podmore's," answered Mrs. Waters in subdued tones. "He is in great trouble to-day—about the failure of this company, you know."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Elkins with an assumption of surprise, but immediately afterwards, feeling perhaps that it was impossible to ignore the subject longer, however much he might have liked, for reasons of his own, to do so, he dropped the surprise, and went on sympathizingly: "Ah, yes! I heard something about it—most deeply concerned, I am sure. But I would fain trust that the accounts are very greatly exaggerated?"

"I don't know—I hope so," sadly responded Mrs. Waters. "My poor husband is very anxious."

"I am extremely sorry for it," said Mr. Elkins with extra solemnity—intended perhaps to carry off a certain awkwardness of which he was conscious.

"And so am I—extremely," chimed in Mrs. Elkins, adjusting her bonnet-strings. "But Mr. Waters knows in what quarter to look for consolation, and he will not fail, I hope, to turn to it."

"That is the great point," said Mr. Elkins, feeling himself professionally called upon to put in something.

"We must look upon these trials as sent for our good, and learn to rejoice over them," rejoined Mrs. Elkins with unction. "What are worldly riches but a snare, and what, then, is their loss down to the uttermost farthing—"

"But it is not so bad as that by any means," said Emmy, looking up hastily, for this sympathy was more than she could bear. "Papa may be a little inconvenienced for a time until the railway is made, but that will be all, I am sure."

"Really! I am most truly glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Elkins fervently, forgetting perhaps what she had said about the snare.

"Most truly glad indeed," echoed her husband.

He shifted uneasily on his chair, and paused a little while, as though he would have liked somebody else to follow up the conversation, but every one kept silence, and, with another clearing of his throat, he went on:

"My object in calling—one of my objects, at least—was to hand Mr. Waters a little account which has just been sent in to me. The memorial window, you know; if you remember, Mr. Waters undertook to make up whatever amount might be left underfrayed by public subscription, and of course I am obliged to present him with the bill as soon as I have received it—especially as the people seem to say they are rather pressed for money. Three hundred pounds is the amount, you will perceive—all strictly within the estimate—so that, deducting the five pounds which I succeeded in raising in the shape of subscriptions, that will only leave two hundred and ninety-five pounds to trouble Mr. Waters for. Perhaps you will kindly mention it to him on his return—I shall be so very much obliged to you."

He handed Mrs. Waters a folded paper, which she received with trembling fingers, promising that it should be attended to.

"The window has been wonderfully admired,"

said Mr. Elkins, with something that seemed almost like apology in his tones. "It is surprising how many strangers speak to me about it, and wish to know who put it up."

But Mrs. Waters made no reply, so Mr. Elkins did not enlarge further on the subject, and for a time in awkward silence, casting about for something else to talk of. He felt that it did not look quite the thing to go away at once.

"Pray have you seen any thing of Miss Egerton lately?" asked Mrs. Elkins, coming to the subject by her husband's assistance.

"Miss Egerton!" stammered Mrs. V. shrinking with pain at the memories which the name suggested. "N—no, not for some time."

"I know she keeps herself very much secluded just now," said Mrs. Elkins, "but I think perhaps she might have made an exception in the case of intimate friends like you."

"I have not seen her for some time," answered Mrs. Waters tremulously. She would have given anything to change the subject, but not how.

"Not since the breaking off of her engagement, then?"

"No."

"How very odd she is, to be sure!" commented Mrs. Elkins mincingly. "One would think that however much she might wish for the present to keep out of the way of her engagements, she would have made a point of explaining matters to a few intimate friends, or at least to some one person in a position of authority, such as a clergyman, for instance. What can she expect people to think of such conduct—engaging herself to a man and then quarrelling with him, never a word of explanation! And even Waddilove knows no more about it than I do—body else—I saw her the other day, and she declared she knew nothing except that Miss Egerton had told her the marriage was broken and that she never wished to hear Mr. Graham's name again. Now, without any wish to pry into anybody's private affairs, I say people have a right to make these mysteries."

"Miss Egerton was always rather eccentric," said Mr. Elkins, palliatively.

"Oh! of course," assented his wife, "but one knows that. Indeed it was a most tragic proceeding altogether, her engaging herself to this Mr. Graham—a man who seemed to have dropped from the clouds, one might say. Though, by-the-way, I think we heard some time that you and Mr. Waters knew something of him?"

"Something—oh yes!" Mrs. Waters justified her strength to reply.

"But not enough, I suppose, for him to tell you anything to you about the reasons of the thing—and to be sure, he left the place so suddenly that there was no time. You have not heard anything from him since, have you?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Waters; and she felt a deadly sinking within her as she made answer.

"It is altogether the strangest affair," remarked Mrs. Elkins. "It seems he went away in a hurry that he left all his things behind, the Brown Bear, and a day or two ago I heard that he had not even sent for them yet. It almost looks as if he intended to come back again, you know."

"You think so?" and the sister felt something like a ray of comfort enter her soul on finding that the apprehension by which she was tormented had not even suggested itself to others. But immediately afterwards she remembered that others had not seen her brother as she had seen him on his way from Egerton House, and did not know as she knew what reason he had for despair.

As she meditated on these things, she was so visibly moved that visitors less well-bred than Mr. and Mrs. Elkins might probably have been tempted to put in a few sympathizing words on the subject, on which her mind was presumably dwelling, of her husband's losses. But they were very well-bred, and ascribing her agitation entirely to the pecuniary misfortunes which had befallen the family, gave themselves some pains to find something further to say about Miss Egerton and her affairs.

"I wonder how it will all turn out," said Mrs. Elkins presently; and this time, the better to ignore Mrs. Waters's emotion, she addressed herself partly to Emmy, who had been listening to the talk about Mr. Graham with an uneasy, half-remorseful self-consciousness which made her instinctively avoid looking up. "But I suppose the end will be that Miss Egerton will marry her cousin Randal—indeed I fancy there is not much doubt about it now."

There was one instant during which Emmy's heart seemed to stand still with afright, but in the next it was bounding with defiant indignation. How dared people choose such subjects for their idle gossip? How dared that audacious woman talk so confidently of things which she knew and could know nothing about? But she had been so much upset that she could not recover herself in time to reply, and it was Mrs. Waters therefore who answered, with a feeble smile which showed how improbable the suggestion appeared to her:

"I can hardly think that very likely, I must say."

"Oh! but I can assure you it is as good as certain," returned the clergyman's wife with a slight touch of pique. "Mrs. Waddilove says he is at the house nearly every day—the only visitor Miss Egerton sees at all—and we met him ourselves riding down the road yesterday, didn't we, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Elkins, "just outside the park gates."

Emmy did not faint, but there was a darkness before her eyes and a booming in her ears which for the while made every thing external a blank—every thing external, for in the midst of that inner whirl and commotion her thoughts were at work with torturing activity. So he had not been ill, he had not been called away on business—he had been riding about the country, making constant visits in the immediate neighborhood—he had been seen only yesterday—she writhed with pain and shame as she thought of it. It was not therefore because he could not come, but because he would not; he had deliberately deserted her on finding his rich cousin free again—deserted her after those promises, those looks, that tender pressure of the hand. He was a villain then, a treacherous, cowardly, cruel villain—he whom she had trusted so, he of whom she had made such a hero, he to whom she had confided her mother's secret. Ah! that secret—who but

9

he could have told it? The secret had been told—told almost within the same hour in which he had learned it from her lips; and, knowing of him what she now did, how could she doubt longer? So it had been all her fault, then—her mother's pallid face and wasted frame, her mother's daily and hourly anguish? What had she done? what had she done?

She was at last roused by having to go through the form of saying good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Elkins, who, probably finding it too much for them to keep up a conversation under such adverse circumstances, had now risen to take leave. But burdensome as she had found their presence, their absence brought no relief. She was alone with her mother, and she dared not look her mother in the face. For a moment, indeed, as she heard the long-drawn sigh with which Mrs. Waters returned to her place after the departure of the visitors, she felt an impulse to throw herself into those kind arms which had so often been folded lovingly round her, and make a weeping avowal of her fault. But her fault was so great, and its consequences so dire, that she shrank from confessing it for very shame; she could not find courage in sight of her mother's wretchedness to go up and accuse herself as its cause. And then there was just the possibility that she might not have been the cause, after all. If she could but think so! She rose abruptly with some muttered excuse, and hurried from the room.

Oh, the fool that she had been—the weak, wicked fool! That she should have put her faith in that man, looked up to him and been ready to love him (for she had never really loved him surely)—and all just because he was rich and well-born, and paid her compliments—ah! how she saw through him now! how she saw through her own vanity and folly! And to think that for him she had used John Thwaites so badly, John Thwaites, who had more worth in his little finger than that other one in his whole body—yes, and she had used him badly, very, very badly; she did not understand how she could ever have tried to pretend to herself that she had not. She had asked him for the ribbon, and how could he have done else than return it?—he had acted throughout like the man of honor and spirit and self-respect that he was. He had been too good for her, that was his only fault; and now he had found it out, and she had lost him for ever and ever. Oh! how much evil that man had done her—how much, even if he had not really betrayed her secret. And if he had—if he had—ah! poor mamma—poor dear darling mamma!

And here Emmy fairly gave way, and, throwing herself on her bed—she was safe in her own chamber by this time—sobbed as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. WATERS TAKES A RESOLUTION.

MEANWHILE Austin had humbled himself at Mr. Podmore's feet to the very dust. For Mr. Podmore had by no means gone to meet the returning prodigal half way, but had stood firmly on the pedestal of his own dignity, sternly listening to the appeals of his penitent votary, and for a low

time unresponsive to them. At first he would not even understand that Mr. Waters could possibly desire to honor him with a renewal of confidence; and when at length it was definitively explained to him that such was really the case, it was necessary to make the most abject apologies and entreaties before he could see his way to accept the proffered responsibility. But Austin was too desperate to hesitate at any amount of abjectness, and after a while his mingled protestations of contrition for the past and of blind allegiance for the future had the desired effect. Mr. Podmore, through regard, as he said, for the memory of his late client, Mr. Waters's respected uncle, undertook to look into the state of affairs, and to do the best he could.

Even after matters had reached this point, Austin was kept in that office for what looked to him a whole age, fretting and fuming in torturing suspense as to what his fate might be. Mr. Podmore had promised to give an opinion on the facts of the case, but until the facts of the case had been laid before him in the most complete and circumstantial manner he would not allow the faintest glimmer of an opinion to escape him. In vain the anxious client was constantly asking what he thought; Mr. Podmore would not let himself be one whit hurried, and kept on questioning and cross-questioning and noting down answers and reckoning up figures and striking balances till Austin was like to go mad with impatience. And even when at last, having considered and calculated till he could consider and calculate no more, Mr. Podmore threw himself oracularly back in his arm-chair, and began to sum up the results of his deliberation—even then he by no means came to the point at once.

"Of course this case is one susceptible of great modification by circumstances hereafter to transpire, but it appears to me on a *prima facie* view that the facts are these," and here Mr. Podmore made a flourish in the air with a large quill pen as though drawing up an imaginary statement.

"You have incurred liabilities (of no portion of which, I am sorry to say, I can hold out to you any definite prospect of being relieved) which at the most moderate computation must be some thousands of pounds in excess of your assets—that is, as I have explained, your assets taken at their present value, and with due consideration of the greater or less disadvantage of a forced sale."

"And do you mean, then—" stammered Austin, but Mr. Podmore with a majestic wave of his pen reduced him into silence while he went on:

"On the other hand, it is probable that part of the property constituting those assets is of a kind capable of considerable improvement. When the railway is made, the land and building materials at Beacon Bay which now would have to be sold at less than their actual cost—"

"And will they have to be sold, will they?" exclaimed Austin in terror. "That's just what I am afraid of, and yet it would be so infamously unjust, nobody surely— What! for the sake of a few trumpery thousands to take away property that in a year or two will be worth millions— Why, what are you looking at me in that way for? you know you said yourself—"

"I said the property is probably capable of

considerable improvement," returned Mr. Podmore with a shrug of the shoulders, "and I say so still. And supposing you are able to retain it, I believe it offers you a very fair chance of ultimately securing a moderate competency."

"A competency, Mr. Podmore! Why—"

"And for that reason," continued the lawyer, once more waving him into silence, "for that reason I am of opinion that its retention ought to be the great object of your endeavors at the present moment. The only question is"—and here Mr. Podmore made a lunge with his pen as though probing space for an answer—"How far will those endeavors be successful?"

This was just the question which Austin wanted to get solved, and, finding that the oracle had not yet gone farther than propounding it, he could only look blankly before him in mute despondency.

Mr. Podmore went on, but not so much by way of answering the question as of reducing it to a point.

"I do not think I can hold out any hope that you will be enabled to raise money by loan on the security of the estate or otherwise. It appears from what you say that half the purchase money of the property is still standing over on mortgage, and such being the case, you would hardly be able to obtain any further sum except at a rate of interest which would equally have the effect of breaking down your resources. So that evidently all hope from that quarter must be abandoned."

Austin still said nothing, only raised his eyes to Mr. Podmore's face in helpless entreaty. He could refute none of the lawyer's arguments, and yet they seemed to point straight to despair.

Mr. Podmore paused a few seconds, so as to give his client full time to realize the situation, then resumed, bringing the finger-tips of his two hands lightly together:

"The only course which I can suggest is that I, as your legal adviser and representative, should endeavor to induce some or all of the creditors to allow a portion of their claims to stand over for two or three years at a due rate of interest. Such an arrangement seems to afford them a chance which they might not otherwise possess of the satisfaction in full of their demands, while for you it would obtain the time requisite for the partial retrieving of your position by the improvement of the Beacon Bay estate."

The light returned to Austin's eyes as he listened; he saw an opening in the clouds just when he had least expected it.

"Of course, of course," he cried feverishly, "the very thing. Only get them to wait a little, and it will be all right—time is all I want. And they will give it me, won't they? for their own sakes they will be sure to give it me."

"On that point I can not undertake to pronounce a positive opinion," said Mr. Podmore, joining and disjoining his finger-tips with slow measured beat. "It all turns on whether I shall be able to convince them that waiting will be for their own interest. But I do not conceal from you that, as the success of such an application depends in some degree on the character of the solicitor who makes it, and the confidence inspired by his personal assertion, you have one point—well, it does not become me to say exactly of advantage—"

"Oh yes! I have, indeed I have, and shall ver be able to thank you enough for it. Yes, ere can be no doubt, can there?—when one inks of that, you know. Oh! you are certain succeed, quite certain."

"I think it may not be altogether impossible," plied Mr. Podmore with modest dignity.

"Oh! the thing is as sure as any thing. 'hy then, and so every thing will come right, terall. The railway is to be open in two years, id then all this will be as though it had never en."

"Your losses will then probably be in a conlerable measure repaired," said Mr. Podmore, rugging his shoulders again. "But an acceson of unlimited wealth such as you appear to ntemplate, I could not conscientiously lead you look forward to."

"Not for the first year or two after the openng, perhaps. But afterwards—why, it stands to ason. All the sea-frontage is mine for half a ile, you know, and when once the place beomes a great port—"

"Ah yes! when," interrupted Mr. Podmore, mewhat curtly. "Mr. Waters, it has been ur mistake all along to be too sanguine, and I ust not encourage you in it."

"But there is such a thing as not being sanine enough," said Austin eagerly, "and that a mistake too sometimes. And you recollect, r. Podmore, you always thought the railway ould not be made at all, didn't you now?" Mr. Podmore got suddenly rather red in the e, and drew himself up so stiffly that Austin th some consternation knew at once that he is offended.

"I am quite aware, Mr. Waters, that such was e impression on my mind. And I do not sitate to say that I am still of opinion that, d the Directors understood their own and the mpany's interests, the line would not have en decided on. The expense of constructing en so short a branch through such a hilly distict will be very great, and it is three years since e ordinary shareholders of the Company reved a farthing of dividend. But on your acunt I sincerely rejoice that the Directors have ten a different view of the case."

It was as much as Austin could do to contain e impatience while Mr. Podmore enunciated an gument in his estimation so utterly short-sightand obsolete. But he saw that the lawyer s disposed to be irritable on the subject, and, nembering how much depended on keeping n in good humor at this juncture, he did not ry the controversy farther. After all, it was ly natural for a man in Mr. Podmore's place, ving been once wrong, to wish to let himself wn as easily as possible.

"I ought to be very much obliged to you for ur kind expressions, Mr. Podmore," he said mblly. "And I hope you know that any litedifference of opinion which might be between on a matter like that doesn't in the least af t my gratitude, or diminish my respect for r judgment."

Mr. Podmore bowed, still however rather stiffand Austin, afraid that he might have been little too patronizing, went on more humbly ll:

"I look on you in the light of a preserver and iverer, and always should, if I were to live a

thousand years. You have saved me and my poor family from ruin, and I will bless you forever."

"I will do my best for you, and that is all I can say," returned Mr. Podmore, more graciously this time. "But you must remember that nothing has been done yet."

"Oh! but I am not afraid; when a man like you takes a thing in hand, it is as good as done already. A little time is all I want; and when it is known that you are acting for me—a person so universally respected and looked up to—"

"I should not wonder but that I may be able to do something," said Mr. Podmore with increasing urbanity. "And now perhaps—" here he looked at his watch—"as the case is one in which some step ought to be taken with as little delay as possible, and I am pressed with a great many other matters—"

"Ah yes! to be sure, your valuable time—I beg your pardon for trespassing so long," said Austin, rising in great haste. He had never been hurried out of that office, in former times, but it did not occur to him to feel aggrieved; hardly any thing could have made him feel aggrieved with Mr. Podmore to-day. For though there might have been a little instinctive flattery in what he had said just now, he did most genuinely regard Mr. Podmore as a benefactor who had snatched him as a brand from the burning. "Good-afternoon; and I'm sure if you had any idea how truly grateful—"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Waters," said the lawyer blandly, but still perhaps rather edging him out of the room. "You may rely on my doing my utmost to secure your interests."

He called a clerk to open the door, and Austin, with a few more mumbled words of thanks, went out and took the way towards home.

The load that had lifted itself off his mind since he had passed along that same road in the morning!—so heavy it had been that now, relieved from it, he felt almost jubilant. So there was hope for him yet; he had lost much, but the means of self-recovery were to be left—at least Mr. Podmore had promised to endeavor that they should be left, and Mr. Podmore would have made no such promise without good expectation of succeeding. And if, as was almost certain, Mr. Podmore did succeed, if Beacon Bay could be but saved, why, then there were all things possible. The property would improve, the lawyer himself admitted that—improve so much as to pay off all debts and yield a sufficiency on which to live comfortably into the bargain. And Mr. Podmore was so morbidly cautious, so absurdly particular to be within the mark, such an admission from him meant a great deal more than appeared on the surface. Besides, he had a direct interest in depreciating the value of the Beacon Bay investment; he had committed himself against it at first, and now would naturally make the least of its advantages that he could—the wonder was that he had allowed so much. It was evident that he must think the capabilities of the property much greater than he acknowledged; and if he thought so, with his dull lymphatic temperament, what must they be in reality! Surely, then, while Beacon Bay was retained, it could not be said that any thing was lost. The debts would be paid off in a couple of years, on t

opening of the railway; in another year the money lost by the Anglo-Cosmopolitan would be made up; and in a year after that the further development of Waterston would constitute its proprietor the richest man in the county.

Sustaining himself with these and similar arguments, he reached home, if not exactly in good spirits, at least in a state of nervous excitement which might be mistaken for good spirits, and went straight to the room where he had left his wife and daughter.

Emmy was no longer there, but Mrs. Waters was still sitting much as she had been ever since the Elkinsons went away, with her chin resting disconsolately on her hand, and her eyes fixed on the fire in dreary contemplation. As her husband entered, she looked up, and at sight of his face a slight exclamation as of satisfaction escaped her.

"Well, Austin. You are better again?"

"Yes, I have seen Podmore, and he says that all will come right. Beacon Bay will make every thing up."

"I am very glad to hear it, dear," said Mrs. Waters, to whom indeed the news for her husband's sake brought inexpressible comfort. For if ruin had really come, how would he have borne it?

"I knew you would be. Yes, Podmore is going to see me through—he will get the creditors to wait a year or two, and then, as he says himself, Beacon Bay will make it all right again. And if Podmore says so, you may know what to think."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Mrs. Waters again, but rather more absently this time. Now that her mind was relieved from present anxiety on her husband's account, another consideration had occurred to her which hardly left her any attention to give to what he was saying, and with a sigh she turned her eyes once more towards the fire.

"Yes," continued Austin, "I always knew there was a gold mine in that property, and if I didn't know it before, I should know it now; Podmore wouldn't say as much without having good reason, you may depend. So cheer up; all's well that ends well, eh?"

There was a tone almost of gleefulness in his voice that jarred on the wife very painfully. She tried to answer, but could not, only brought forth yet another sigh.

"Why, Agnes, what's the matter? you don't congratulate me half. I really think you might try—"

"I can't help it," she pleaded, hastily wiping her eyes. "I was thinking—"

"Thinking of what?" he asked angrily, finding that she had come to an abrupt stop.

"Of Harry," she answered reluctantly, and then burst into tears.

He turned suddenly pale and cold as death.

"What of him? has he come back? has he told? My God! if he has—"

"Oh no! it is not that; how can you think it? But I am afraid, I am afraid—he has been so long without writing, and he looked so ill—Oh! Austin, when I think of it, I am miserable."

She wept convulsively, obliged at last to give full way to the grief which in her husband's presence she had so long struggled to conceal.

Meanwhile he stood by silently and looked on, with evident concern for her distress, and yet, in the midst of his concern, visibly regaining composure.

"Then what do you suppose can have happened to him?" he asked presently.

"I don't know, but sometimes I think— You have no idea how he looked—like a man half dead already—he may have been taken ill perhaps, and with nobody near to nurse him. Or perhaps—he was desperate at the time, and a desperate man has so many ways—and yet I can't believe that either; it is too dreadful. But if he is living, why does he make me suffer so?"

She raised her voice at the last words, as though making frantic appeal for an answer. But for some time no answer came, Austin remaining wrapped in meditation. So deep was his meditation, and so different was his train of thought from that which his wife's anguish seemed calculated to suggest, that, as he shook himself at last out of his reverie, he drew something not unlike a breath of relief.

"I am very sorry, I'm sure," he said, bringing his eyes slowly back upon her. "But you will make yourself ill if you vex about it so. And you may be mistaken, after all, you know." She shook her head despairingly.

"If I could but think so! But why does he not write?"

"It is very strange, certainly," admitted Austin, and there was an unwonted sparkle in his eyes as though from some suppressed excitement. "But we can be sure of nothing yet; he may be on his way back to India perhaps. Only wait patiently a little longer."

"Wait—wait—you all tell me to wait. Yes, I must wait, I must, and yet how I do not know. Oh! Austin, don't think me unreasonable—I could be very patient if only I could fancy it was as you say; let me have the slightest proof, and I could wait contentedly for months. And is that really what you think—that he is on his way back to India?"

"It is quite possible," said Austin, with no very great emphasis, however. "There are plenty of things that may have kept him from writing; he may have had to leave in a great hurry perhaps, in some vessel just starting. Oh yes! it is quite possible."

"If it really was so!" she cried with flushing cheeks—"if really— But how can I be sure? To have to wait weeks and weeks more without knowing—how am I to bear it?" and she clasped her hands in a kind of terror at the prospect. "Oh! Austin, could you not try to find out for me? If he has left the country there must be some way of getting to know it, surely—indeed, wherever he may have gone— Try to find out, dear Austin, try; ask some one—"

"You don't understand what you are talking about," interrupted her husband rather peevishly. "What! would you have every body in the place know that we are inquiring about him? What would they think? And besides, who is there to ask? how could we set about it?"

She saw the difficulty, and bowed her head in despairing resignation.

"There, don't grieve about it, Agnes," he resumed more kindly; "you will only make yourself ill, and do no good. We must just hope for

the best and think of it as little as possible; that is what I try to do, and of course, if there was any thing wrong, I should be as sorry as any body—of course I should."

She made a feeble gesture of assent, and said nothing. The paroxysm of grief and anxiety which had first led to the mention of her brother's name had somewhat cooled down, and the old instinctive feeling that on this subject her husband and herself were out of sympathy began to resume its sway. She hardly knew how it was, but she did not wish to say more to him of her fears, or even to receive his attempted consolation.

Perhaps Austin, on his side, rather desired to bring the conversation to an end also. At all events, on finding that she did not seem inclined to follow it up, he was quite ready to acquiesce.

"I think I had better go and see after a few things I have got to do before dinner—papers and so on to look out for Podmore; so if you don't mind—but indeed I dare say you'll be more comfortable alone. I am sorry you should be so anxious, poor dear Agnes: not but what I'm just as anxious too, of course—but fretting can be of no earthly use, and you see how many other things there are to attend to. There, good-bye, and try not to think any more about it."

She answered something that sounded like a promise to obey, but it was probably made more to avoid prolonging the discussion than any thing else; for no sooner did she find herself alone than, instead of acting on Austin's injunction to endeavor to think no more of the subject, she fell to musing on it so profoundly that she could think of nothing else.

A new idea had been suggested by that conversation with her husband—or rather an old one had presented itself with greater force than formerly. Could not an attempt be made to discover something as to her brother's whereabouts and what had become of him? Might it not at least be possible to find out whether he had been bound on the day of that ill-omened journey? If only the faintest clue was to be obtained, she would grudge no trouble in following it up; she was ready to travel hundreds of miles, if by so doing she could obtain definite news either of his hurried departure from the country (ah! if only she could hope to find it thus!), or—of whatever else might have happened. As she thought of the exertions she might make if she had the slightest thread to guide her, she chafed so feverishly under her forced inactivity that she felt as though she could not bear it longer.

But what was she to do? As her husband had said, who was there to ask? How was the thing to be set about? If she inquired about Mr. Graham too particularly, there was the danger of making people suspect in what relation he stood to her, and for her brother's sake she shrank from the betrayal of his identity almost as much as Austin himself did. Then it was very doubtful whether any body in Chorcombe really knew more than herself. He was not likely to have spoken to any stranger of his intentions, and no ticket-clerk or railway-porter could be expected to remember what had been the destination of an unknown traveller nearly three weeks ago.

There was indeed one person in Chorcombe who was not a stranger to him, a person with whom he had had a long interview within an hour

of his departure. Was it possible that he might have said something to Miss Egerton of his plans? But no, it was not likely that in his desperation he would have found any thing to say about the future; it was not likely even that he had so much as bestowed a thought on it. And then how could she face Miss Egerton, after the scene that had passed between them at their last meeting?

Ah! but for her brother's sake she was strong enough to face any body or any thing, if only she could hope to find something to relieve this cruel suspense. And Miss Egerton, however cold or haughty she might be, would certainly tell all that she knew, could not refuse a plain answer to a plain question. Besides, being the only person in Chorcombe who was informed of Harold Maxwell's return to England under a feigned name, Miss Egerton was also the only person of whom inquiries might be made without danger of disgracing him yet further. It could do no harm, then, to ask her; the only question was, could it do good? Well, there was a chance, surely. It was from her house that he had gone forth on his journey that dreadful day, and it was at least possible that he might have let fall something concerning his destination—the merest word, perhaps, but still something which might be found a clue. And yet it was so very improbable that he had said any thing, and the visit would be so painful—

Thus for a long time Mrs. Waters sat pondering and wavering, sometimes half resolved to go to Egerton House without an hour's loss of time, sometimes shrinking from the project as involving only a useless sacrifice of feeling. But the idea, as often as it was put away, returned again on a review of the circumstances of the case, and in greater force than ever. It was not that the scheme appeared in itself more promising as she considered it, but that there was absolutely nothing else which she could do. She must either try the effect of applying to Miss Egerton, or sit still and wait as she had waited heretofore.

But the prospect of waiting was intolerable. She had therefore only the other alternative left, and ultimately she determined to adopt it. When at last she quitted that room to rejoin her husband and daughter, it was with a firm resolution, kept, however, rigorously to herself, that if another morning came and brought no tidings, she would take her way to Miss Egerton's without further delay.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RANDAL SCORES A POINT.

It was not true that a marriage between Olivia and her cousin Randal was as good as settled—so far rumor was wrong. But it was true that Randal had been of late a very frequent if not daily visitor at Egerton House; so far rumor was quite right.

In the bitterness of her despair and shame at discovering what manner of man it was on whom she had prodigally poured forth all the love of her nature, Olivia would have liked to shut herself up from sight of all the world with no single exception. But she could not exclude from her presence one who was not merely her own near relation, but, moreover, the person to whose right

ance she was indebted for deliverance from the snare into which she had already fallen. So when Randal presented himself, first to beg her pardon for the revelation he had been obliged to make, then, next day, to inquire after her health, then, a day or two after that, to inquire again, then, on the morrow, because he happened to be passing, and could not find himself so near without looking in, then, in a day or two more, to ask for the loan of a book which he believed to be in the Egerton House library—when he thus perpetually kept on calling on one pretext or another, she always forced herself to see him, and even to make him welcome.

And then it was not only that she knew him to have a claim on her which she was in propriety and justice bound to recognize; she felt genuinely grateful for what she could not but regard as his generosity in concealing from others the discovery which it overwhelmed her with humiliation even to think upon, genuinely grateful for the personal interest in her which his visits implied, and which, even when she found this expression of it most irksome, was not without a soothing influence on her wounded self-respect. She despised and hated herself so much for her own past weakness that it was quite a relief to find it condoned by the continued friendship of one who, besides knowing all the circumstances of her folly, was also a member of the family on which she had been near bringing the disgrace of alliance with a thief and a forger. In brief, she felt that Randal had a right to censure and condemn her, and that she was indebted to him in proportion as he abstained from using it.

Randal saw the progress he had so rapidly made not only in his cousin's intimacy, but in her liking and esteem, and did not fail to draw from it the most favorable auguries for his ultimate attainment of the object on which he was now more than ever bent. He had too much tact, however, to startle her by any hasty overture; and at the time when, as has been seen, he was set down by the gossips of the countryside almost as her accepted suitor, no word of direct wooing had passed his lips. No word of direct wooing, for he had taken care occasionally to let fall some tender compliment or expression of more than cousinly interest by way of feeling his ground. And, on the whole, he was pleased with the result of these experiments; for though Olivia never encouraged such utterances, and always showed herself in haste to change the subjects which had led to them, she did not put them down, as she had been wont to do, with chilling or biting retorts. It was plain that whatever might be her precise disposition towards him, he had nothing to fear from that old spirit of sarcasm and raillery which had once made her so difficult so deal with, and, under these circumstances, he felt emboldened to hope all things.

After a great deal of patient waiting and cautious preparation, he judged at last that the time had come for more decisive action.

"I think you understand me better than you did, Olivia," he said one day when, having made his way to Egerton House as he so often did now, he found her, as he thought, more than usually cordial.

"A great deal better, Randal—oh yes! I understand that you are very kind and generous, and that I have cause to be most deeply grateful.

And I am grateful, you may believe that, whether I say any thing about it or not" (these words were spoken very earnestly). "But you have not told me yet where you are going to spend your Christmas," she added, with a quick relapse into her ordinary tone.

She could have said a great deal more both of her present gratitude and of her remorse for injustice formerly done him, but she had an instinctive feeling that she was on ground more or less dangerous, and, hardly knowing why, preferred to shift it if possible.

She was not allowed to shift it so easily, however, for he went on, taking no notice of her last remark:

"Then, if circumstances are so much changed, you can not blame me for asking again a question I have asked before—asked so often that you might think me impertinent for repeating it the conditions of the case were not so completely altered. But at least you will not think so badly of me as that, will you, Olivia?"

"You know very well I could not think badly of you," she answered as steadily as she could yet with an uncomfortable apprehension of what he might have in his mind, which made her long more than ever to turn the conversation into another channel. But not being able to find anything to say which might have that effect, she proceeded with a kind of desperate courage to demand:

"What question is it?"

"Can you not guess, Olivia?" and he threw a pathos into his voice and look which left no further doubt as to his drift. "A very simple question, and yet one on the answer to which my whole happiness depends. Will you be mine?"

Olivia had had a sort of presentiment that something like this might be coming, and yet she was surprised—so much surprised that for a while she was wholly incapable of making answer. It seemed to her almost incredible that after what had happened he could still seriously wish that she should be his wife—she who by his timely interference had been so lately saved from making herself a public laughing-stock—she whom he knew to have lavished all the love she had to give on a returned felon. The sundry tender expressions that from time to time he had let fall had indeed occasionally suggested to her that there might be some danger of a renewal of his suit, only on reflection the idea had always seemed so preposterous that she preferred to ascribe all unwelcome symptoms to a good-natured desire of applying balm to her lacerated self-esteem. Yet here he was, not paying merely empty compliments, but actually making formal demand for her hand—the hand which only a few weeks ago had been pledged so unworthily that she shrank with pain and shame at the recollection. She could hardly believe her ears.

"Olivia, will you not answer? You are not angry, surely?"

He put out his hand to take hers, but she drew it hastily away.

"Not angry—I have no right, of course; but so much surprised— Please do not say any thing more about it, Randal; it grieves me more than I can express."

She was indeed very much pained by what he had said, and yet, even in speaking, she was con-

scious that in some slight degree she had been gratified too. It was a kind of comfort to find that she had not irredeemably lost caste in the estimation of one who was acquainted with all that was ludicrous and humiliating in her short-lived romance.

"And why should you be grieved? Have you so little regard for me, then?"

"It is just because I have a regard for you that I am grieved. Pray, pray say no more; you know very well that it can never be."

"Why should it never be?" he persisted. "You have some regard for me, you say; then what reason—"

"Yes, regard, but not— Forgive me, Randal, and don't think me ungrateful, for I am not—but you are only paining me and yourself for nothing. I thank you very much, but it is impossible—quite impossible."

He looked at her scrutinizingly, and understood that she was very much in earnest. But he had persevered too long to be willing to give up now.

"Oh, that man!" he exclaimed, with a burst so abrupt as to be almost melodramatic, "the evil he has to answer for! I thought it was over, but it is not; you can not forget him; you try, but you can not. Ah! my poor dear wronged cousin!"

If the words were meant to sting, they answered their end well. Whether it was their tone of implied reproach or their tone of implied compassion that wounded her most, Olivia herself could not have said, but she was wounded to the very quick. That she should be openly accused of the despicable, the degrading weakness of caring for the man still—a weakness against the bare possibility of which she was forever jealously guarding! How dared any body say or think such a thing of her? And yet was it wonderful, knowing as every body did how infatuated she had been once? She had never felt the depth of her humiliation so keenly as she felt it now—never, at least, since the first fatal hour of discovery.

"You are quite mistaken," she said with crimsoning cheeks, and an attempt at her old pride of manner. "I can forget, and I do. Every thing connected with that time is past and done with—every thing." Then, suddenly remembering how ill the affectation of haughtiness became her under present circumstances, she let her head fall forward, and added in a choking voice: "Except the shame, and that will stay with me for ever and ever."

He contemplated her drooping figure for a while in silence, then, drawing his chair a trifle nearer, laid his hand on hers very kindly, not, however, exactly repeating his attempt to take hold of it.

"Why should you be ashamed, Olivia? You made a mistake, but it was merely a mistake of too much goodness and generosity. I am one of the two or three persons in the world that know of it or ever can know of it, and I admire and respect you as much as ever I did. My dear cousin, why should you be ashamed?"

"I have only too good cause," said Olivia sadly. "But it is very kind of you to try to comfort me, I know, and I am grateful, believe me."

And grateful she did indeed feel. For the very reason that she had never been less disposed to be comforted than at the present moment, she

felt the attempt at comforting her to be very delicate and generous.

"Grateful! I detest the word. And as for trying to comfort you, I am only saying what I feel; you ought to know that. But the truth is your feelings towards me are so different from mine towards you that you can not even give me credit for them."

With this she sighed as deeply as ever he had done in old times when his sighs had been wont to raise all Olivia's ire against him. But somehow her ire was not raised now. It was not that she believed in his professions of love no more than she had believed in them then; she had never in her life been so little in the mood for imagining herself capable of inspiring a genuine passion. But, feeling as she did re- friendship for her cousin, she was inclined to believe that real friendship for herself might be among his motives for seeking a union which doubtless also seemed desirable to him on grounds of self-interest. She could have wished that he had not renewed his suit at all, but she could not impute to him as an offense that, having renewed it, he still pleaded it in conventional suitor's language. On the contrary, she felt that in framing his new addresses so precisely on the model of the old, he showed a disposition to condone and ignore the past which was very considerate.

Randal knew that he had sometimes erred to the over-ardor of his professions, and, finding this no answer was returned, began to fear that he might have done so now.

"I am afraid you are offended, Olivia."

"Offended—oh no!" she answered, with sharp twinge of remorse at remembering how often she had been offended with him for a greater cause. "After all your kindness—how can you believe it of me? But—"

"There! again you will persist in being grateful—grateful in words, at least. Oh! Olivia, you think you have really any thing to thank me for, why will you refuse me the one only reward that I care for?"

"Because I can not consent—in justice to myself I can not. I do not feel towards you as I ought to feel towards you if—if I did; you wish. Forgive me; you understand what I mean."

"You mean that you do not love me?"

"Not in that way. Oh! Randal, why do you pain me so? You know what friendship feels for you, and if I could feel more than friendship I would. But I can not—I am very sorry, but I can not."

And in saying this Olivia did really, for the first time in her life, regret that she could not bring herself to answer her cousin differently. It was very painful to have to deny what he was so persistent in asking.

"But if I am willing to be content with friendship?" he argued. "I should be only too proud and happy to have your love, I need not say, but it will come afterwards, I am not afraid. As for blind passionate love before marriage being necessary basis of happiness, that is all romance and delusion."

"Oh! in some cases, certainly," said Olivia and her lip curled bitterly as she thought what very unstable basis of happiness her own had proved. And how blind and passionate love had been Heaven only knew.

"You really do feel friendship for me, Olivia, do you not?"

"Oh! Randal, of course; how can you ask? But for that very reason—"

"And you esteem me a little, I hope?"

"I esteem you very much indeed; you are every thing that is good and kind and considerate—a thousand times more so than I deserve. But if you would only hear me—"

"Hear me first, Olivia. Friendship and esteem—what more solid guaranties of happiness can be sought for in marriage than these? I suppose you wish, as every body must wish, to be as happy and useful in this world as you can; and if so, how can you do better than marry a man who for years has lived in the hope of winning you, and whom you yourself confess to liking and esteeming?"

Olivia felt rather perplexed by the question. She still shrank from the conclusion to which her cousin's arguments pointed, and yet she could not deny that the arguments in themselves seemed reasonable enough.

"No, Randal, no; it might suit most people, but not me. I will try to be as happy and useful as I can, but it must be in living by myself. I have had plenty of experience of living by myself, you know; it is only going on as I began."

She attempted a smile here, but, in spite of herself, it was a very faint one. She could not help thinking how very different her future must be from her past—that past which, if it had sometimes been monotonous and lonely, had at least been fraught with such keen enjoyment of the sense of independence and self-reliance. She had held her head so high then, had felt so strong and vigorous and self-confident; and now she was so crushed and broken and ashamed! Ah! the dreary hours that she would have to spend in communion with her own self-reproach—she quailed as she thought of them.

"Going on as you began! And did you not begin by making a great mistake?" asked Randal, after a pause during which he had been intently watching her.

She quite started as she heard; the words were so exact an expression of a doubt which just then had been passing through her own brain that they seemed almost an echo. A mistake—yes, truly she had made a mistake—a mistake in deeming herself strong when she was weak, wise when she was foolish, able to go alone, when but for timely aid she was about plunging into an abyss. A great mistake, no question.

"Silence gives assent—is it not so?" said Randal caressingly; then, as she still did not answer, he drew nearer, and, in his tenderest accents, whispered: "Ah! Olivia, keep silence still, and let it give assent to every thing—to my happiness—to yours. I would make you happy, believe me."

And his arm slipped round her waist as he was speaking.

She roused herself, and pushed his arm away almost rudely.

"No, leave me—I tell you I will not. This is persecution—leave me this moment."

He rose, looking very much humbled—so much humbled that Olivia, remembering the fate from which he had saved her, was seized with *dismay at her own ingratitude*.

"Forgive me—I did not mean it. I hardly know what I am doing. Forgive me, Randal, for indeed my heart is breaking."

And for the first time in Randal's presence she burst into tears.

He was at her side again in an instant.

"You did not mean it! Then I may still hope! Ah! Olivia, my poor dear Olivia, you will let me have the right of comforting you, will you not?"

She made no answer; she saw that she had put herself at a disadvantage by her precipitation, and she knew not how to repair the error. Besides, she was weeping still, and her tears seemed to have taken away all her energy.

He took hold of her hand, and this time she did not withdraw it; how could she without running the risk of offending him anew? She felt strangely, uncomfortably helpless; was she, then, really doomed to yield at last the consent she had so long withheld? Well, after all, perhaps it might be the wisest course, and it was one against which she had exhausted all her powers of reasoning.

Randal saw his advantage, and did not fail to press it.

"It is settled, Olivia, settled at last. You are mine, and I may call you so."

She felt that the toils were closing round her, and made a desperate effort to keep them from closing quite.

"Not yet, not yet, you must give me time. Let me have a day to think, and I promise that you shall have your answer."

"Let me have my answer now; say yes at once."

"No, I must have time—I must and will. Randal, let me go."

She spoke so firmly, and drew her hand from his with so much decision, that he understood it would be dangerous to urge her too closely for the present.

"You are not trifling with me, Olivia? You are not sending me away to wait when you have made up your mind against me already? I will go, but only tell me that I have a chance."

"You have a chance—there, that is enough. I tell you I must have time."

"You shall have time," he said, and moved towards the door. "Olivia, I can trust you, I am sure. You have told me that I have a chance, and you are not cruel enough to make me hope only to disappoint me. And how am I to know my fate?"

"I will write to you—perhaps to-day. But, remember, nothing is—"

"Oh! nothing is settled, I know; you are free to dash me down into despair after raising me to the highest pinnacle of hope, and I shall have no right to complain. But still I do not think you can be so cruel, I do not. Olivia, I leave you now, and remember, my whole happiness is in your hands."

And before she had time to say another word in deprecation of his implied confidence in her consent, he waved his hand and was gone.

Olivia's first feeling on being left alone was a kind of half-incredulous consternation. Was it possible that she had actually promised to take the idea of marrying Randal Egerton into consideration, actually given him reason to speak as though he made sure beforehand of her acquies-

cence? What had she been doing? That within so short a time of the breaking-off of one engagement (and such a breaking-off too!) she should be seriously contemplating the possibility of entering into another—what could be thought of her? what could she think of herself? She felt more ashamed and abased than she had felt yet.

Her sense of humiliation was so bitter that after a while she began to rebel against it in sheer self-defense. After all, had she so very much reason to be ashamed? had she done any thing which need appear so very disgraceful and contemptible, either in her own estimation or in that of others? No doubt people would think, if they knew, that she had rooted the old love out of her heart very easily; but then, was not this exactly what she would wish them to think? Was it not something to be much more ashamed of that she should be supposed to be languishing for that—that—and she shuddered, unable to give him a name even in her own mind—to cherish his memory so that the whole happiness of her after-life was destroyed by him? Ah! surely that was the worst degradation of any which could possibly befall her.

And at this stage she ceased to argue whether she ought or ought not to be ashamed of her undertaking to consider her cousin's suit, and set herself to consider it in good earnest.

Certainly, looking at things from the prudential point of view, the arrangement which he suggested had a great deal to recommend it; nothing, indeed, could seem more eminently judicious, or calculated to promote the welfare of both. In all external circumstances of birth and breeding and position and age, each was thoroughly well suited to the other, while on both sides there was the esteem and friendship which, as he had said—and said, she was sure, with truth—constituted the best guarantees for married happiness. Then, moreover, she was bound to him by the strongest ties of gratitude. His watchful friendship had saved her from a fate so dreadful that she dared not think of it, and to his magnanimity she was further indebted for escaping the observation and ridicule which a public disclosure of the facts must have brought with it. Again, how generous he had been in all his dealings with her, how delicately tender of her feelings, how studiously persistent in ignoring that she had done any thing to forfeit his or her own respect! Ah! how much she owed him, to be sure! more than she could hope ever to repay.

And yet there was one way open to her of repaying something—one only way; she might give him the hand he had so often pleaded for, and, giving it, make him master of Egerton Park. If she had not come between, Egerton Park would have been as good as his already; it was she, and she alone, who had kept him and his all these years out of what would otherwise have been their lawful inheritance, and which they certainly would have graced far more than she had done. Was it not almost her duty to consent to make what restitution lay in her power?

Could it be her duty really, she asked herself with a sinking heart, and, burying her face in her hands, she set about reviewing the arguments on the other side.

But when she tried to allege some reason for deciding against her cousin's wishes, she could

not find it save in her own feelings. She preferred to go on living alone as she had lived hitherto; that was all that she could say.

And with what face could she say so to Randal? She preferred living alone, but had she shown herself fit for self-government? Was she indeed really fit for it—a poor weak, helpless creature, who had fallen into the first snare spread for her? And could she even hope to be tolerably happy, living alone after what had occurred? How could she bear to know that wherever she went people would be canvassing her disappointment, as they would please to call it—whispering among themselves how the rich Miss Egerton was pining in secret for a former lover, and had determined to live and die unmarried for his sake? And that was not all—perhaps *he* might hear of it, and think so too.

She started up as though a red-hot iron had touched her. Ah! but he should not think so—never, never; she would show him and all the world differently; she would do her duty to the man who had saved her—would write that very instant—And with feverish haste she flew to her desk, laid a sheet of paper before her, and sat down, pen in hand.

She had already traced the words, "My dear Randal," and was pausing to consider in what phrase she should signify that all was to be as he wished, when the door was thrown open, and a servant appeared to announce:

"Mrs. Waters."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ILLUMINATION.

OLIVIA's first impulse on hearing the name was to gather up the paper on which those three words stood inscribed, crushing it together and huddling it out of sight with as much nervous trepidation as though she had felt herself caught in the perpetration of a crime. She was conscious of really feeling something of the sort, and immediately afterwards, ashamed and angry that it should have been so, raised her head proudly, and confronted the new-comer with a steady look of stately displeasure. The look was so freezing that poor Mrs. Waters, who already had found it a great effort to drag herself a few steps forward into the room, felt all her remaining courage evaporate, and stood unable to offer either explanation or apology.

"I had not expected the honor of seeing you again," said Olivia presently, and her politeness was so chilling that it was more repellent than absolute rudeness might have been. "May I ask to what I am indebted for it?"

She rose as she put the question; she could not sit while her visitor was standing, and she would not ask Harold Maxwell's sister to be seated in her house.

"I am very sorry," Mrs. Waters faltered with some difficulty, on finding herself thus called upon to unfold her business. "I would not have troubled you if I could have helped it—indeed I would not. But I am so unhappy, so anxious, and you are the only person—No, I have not come to ask you for any thing—do not think it—only for an answer to a question. The truth is" (and here the speaker began to tremble so

that she could scarcely articulate), "I have never heard any thing of—of him—my—my brother, you know—never since that day, and I thought perhaps you might be able to tell me—"

"You may spare yourself the trouble of going on," interrupted Olivia with flaming cheeks. "The person of whom you speak is a total stranger to me, and I can say nothing whatever respecting him."

"But you can say surely if he told you any thing about where he intended to go," cried Mrs. Waters, clasping her hands in mingled anguish and entreaty. "Oh! Miss Egerton, do not be cruel to me. I tell you I have lost him—lost him; I do not know even whether he is alive or dead. If he told you what he was going to do—if you have any idea—for pity's sake do not keep it back."

"I recognize no right in you or any one else to trouble me with questions about a person with whom I have not the smallest concern. Still, to shorten the conversation, I do not object to tell you that I have no word of information regarding him either from himself or others. I know nothing whatever about him! and that is all I have to say."

"You know nothing about him!" echoed Mrs. Waters blankly, and an indescribable sense of dismay and disappointment fell upon her like lead. If she had reflected, she would have seen that the chances of her brother's life or death really stood just where they were before; but she was so discouraged by this failure of her last hope that at that moment, with a pang of passionate grief and affection, she gave him up in her own mind for lost.

"I know nothing, and I care nothing," replied Olivia frigidly.

A look of bitterness mingled itself with the sadness on Mrs. Waters's face.

"Ah! how unkind you are, and cold and unforgiving! To hate him like that—after being engaged to marry him—I wonder how— And when he loved you so—ah! how he loved you, to be sure! How can you? how can you?"

"I may rather wonder how you can dare to remind me of what you must know to be the one shame and horror of my life," returned Olivia with sparkling eyes. "And remember, if I really believed what you said last, I should only regard myself as more disgraced and degraded; if possible, than I am already."

"Degraded by his love, do you mean—by Harry's love?" and the eyes generally so mild and subdued in their light flashed as indignantly as Olivia's own. "Degraded! honored, you ought to say; for let me tell you, Miss Egerton, you never were honored so much as when my brother loved you and chose you to be his wife."

The words were uttered so emphatically, and with a face so glowing—not with mere passion, but with genuine sisterly pride and affection—that Olivia for an instant felt almost quelled. But in an instant more she was so angry with this temporary weakness that she made answer, in tones more chilling and incisive than perhaps she had ever used in her life before:

"Your ideas of honor are quite different from mine—so different that the sooner this conversation comes to an end the better. In my estimation it is not an honor, but the grossest insult that can be put upon me, to couple my

name as you have done with that of a man who has committed theft and forgery, no matter how long ago."

"He did not," broke in Mrs. Waters vehemently, and she looked Olivia straight in the face with heaving chest and dilated pupils. "He did not; and whoever says he did is a liar."

As Olivia heard these words, the blood rushed through her veins so impetuously that she almost staggered. But she knew that her interlocutor's eyes were still fixed defiantly upon her, and mastered her agitation sufficiently to ask with contemptuous coldness:

"And if he did not, how comes it that he is content to rest under the accusation?"

A kind of collapse seemed to fall on Mrs. Waters at the question; a spasm passed over her face, a shudder ran through her whole frame; and with a burst of tears she ejaculated:

"Because—because— God forgive me! I am a wretch—a poor, weak, wicked, selfish wretch."

Olivia looked on with a palpitating heart.

"What do you mean by what you have said just now?"

Mrs. Waters dried her eyes hastily.

"Nothing—I don't know—that will do. It seems you can not tell me any thing, so I will go home."

"Stop!" cried Olivia, so peremptorily that the visitor, already on her way to leave the room, wavered and came to a halt. "I insist on knowing what you meant—you meant something, I suppose. What was it? I have a right to know."

"What was it—why, what should it be? I forget now what I said; I was half— There, I must go; they will be waiting for me."

She moved quickly towards the door, but Olivia, coming forward more quickly still, placed herself in the way.

"You do not forget what you said; you know very well what it was. You pretended to believe that your brother was not guilty; you would have liked to make me believe it too if you could." She paused, but the other only trembled and made no answer, and she went on: "But don't think that you succeeded—don't think that I was weak enough to be deceived for one instant. I was surprised at your audacity in trying to deny it, but of course I knew very well that he was guilty—I never doubted it. Ah! and you dare not try again to make me doubt it; you confess by your silence that he is guilty. Yes indeed, if I had not known it before, I should know it now through you."

"He is not guilty!" exclaimed Mrs. Waters with a cry of pain. "He is the noblest, best— There, no more questions—I don't know what I am saying. Let me go, for the love of Heaven!"

She made an endeavor to pass, but Olivia caught her by the arm almost roughly.

"You shall not go until you tell me every thing. You said he was not guilty; what do you mean?"

"Don't ask, for pity's sake—I have said too much already. Ah! if you have any mercy, let that be enough."

"But you must tell me—I must understand—The thing was done, and somebody must have done it. If he was not guilty, who was?"

A deadly paleness overspread Mrs. Waters's

features; her lips absolutely quivered with terror as she felt the searching gaze that fastened itself on her face. At the sight a ray of illumination flashed across Olivia's mind.

"Your husband?" she whispered.

There was a sound of convulsive laboring for breath, then, unable longer to support herself, the poor wife slipped from Olivia's grasp and sank into a chair, wringing her hands and sobbing in a very tempest of sorrow.

Olivia stood by and looked on vacantly—almost like a person stupefied. And stupefied indeed she was, but as one who has been brought suddenly back from darkness into light.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WIFE'S STORY.

"YOUR husband?" repeated Olivia, after an interval of silence during which various emotions had chased each other through her mind so swiftly that, like a rapidly revolving succession of colors, their general effect had been utter blankness.

"Ah! but you will not tell—have mercy for God's sake. It was for me and the children—our poor dead children—not himself. Ah! he was so poor, so sorely tempted—you can never know."

"But if he did it, how came another person to be accused?" severely demanded Olivia; then, before there was time to answer, she added with a keen searching look of suspicion: "And how came that other person to let himself be accused?"

"He did not know it at first; he thought he was only shielding us, and afterwards he was too generous—Ah! dear Miss Egerton—"

"He was betrayed, then?" flashed out Olivia.

"Do not be angry; only bear with me a little, and I will tell you— But oh! my poor husband—you will have mercy—"

"Tell me every thing—this moment—I insist."

"I will, I will, but do not look at me like that; be a little gentle, or I can not."

"There, I will be very gentle;" and, with a great struggle for patience, Olivia seated herself by her visitor's side and endeavored to set an example of external calmness. "And now tell me, how did it happen? Tell me every thing from the beginning."

"It was just after Emmy was born," began Mrs. Waters in a low voice, with difficulty restraining her sobs in obedience to the authority of Olivia's look and manner—"just after Emmy was born, and when our other dear children were beginning to sicken with the fever. You know what we had to live on (we were in debt, besides, to some of the tradespeople at the time), and I was very weak, and the doctor recommended me and the children all sorts of nourishing things, and the baby was to be sent to a neighbor's to be out of the infection, and there was not a farthing of money in the house to pay for it all: and if we had asked any thing from old Mr. Waters it would only have made him so angry that he would never have forgiven us. Ah! when you think of what Austin must have gone through then—and he had to bear it all by himself too, for I was to be kept very quiet, so that he never said a word to me of what he had in his mind. Oh! if he only had!"

She sighed bitterly, so bitterly that if Olivia had not been engrossed by an all-absorbing interest of her own she could hardly have failed to sympathize with her. But as it was, Olivia merely made a movement of impatience and said:

"Go on."

Mrs. Waters obeyed, but her voice was lower and more faltering than ever.

"So he kept on and on, thinking over his miseries by himself, and at last one evening—he told me afterwards it was just after the doctor had said I must have port-wine three times a day—one evening he sat up very late, and—and—Ah! you see what I mean; well, it was then that he did it."

"Forged something with old Mr. Waters's signature, you mean?"

"Yes. But oh! only think how he was tempted. And you know old Mr. Waters had promised to leave us all his money, and this hundred pounds—it was only a hundred—would have been nothing to him one way or another. It was only by chance he came to find out it had been—been taken—at all."

"Go on. You have not told me yet how any one else—"

"I will tell you now. He—Harry, you know—had just left Oxford, and was up in London about a tutorship in some family he had been introduced to. And—and—that same night that he had done it Austin sent the—the thing, you understand—in a letter to Harry, asking him to take it to Mr. Waters's bank in London and get the money."

"Ah, yes! and so draw suspicion on himself; I see," said Olivia with gleaming eyes.

"Ah! but Austin did not mean that—indeed, indeed he did not. He loved Harry like a brother, he did really—then; he would not have hurt him for all the world. But he knew he would be found out at once if he offered such a thing to any body in the neighborhood, and he thought that if he could get a stranger to draw the money in London—that was all he thought of, I do assure you."

"Very well—let it be so. What next?"

"So he sent it to Harry, pretending it was a present he had got from old Mr. Waters on condition that I should know nothing about it, and asked him to bring the money when he came."

"When he came?"

"Yes; it had been settled he should come down to see us on his way to Cornwall, where this family lived that he was going to. And he did come—poor Harry—and brought Austin what he wanted, little guessing, of course, how it was; and then next day he went off again; for, with so much illness in the house, we could not do any thing to welcome him. Ah! I remember how he came to my room that morning to say good-bye, and how he tried to comfort me about the children, and said he would return in a fortnight and find us all well. For he was not to go to Cornwall at once; he had a few spare days that he was going to spend on a walking excursion in Wales, and then he was to come back to us again. But he did not come back—I never saw him from that time to the day I found him sitting with you and Emmy in the drawing-room at Nidbourne. Ah! how little I knew the parting would be so long!"

She paused, weeping violently, but was soon urged forward again by Olivia, who had been listening in breathless impatience.

"And what happened next? It was found out—"

"Ah yes! so soon! Old Mr. Waters took it into his head to draw all his money out of the bank only a few days afterwards, and when he found there was a hundred pounds wrong in the accounts—ah! you know what he was, and you may think of the terrible passion—"

"But how did he get to suspect—any body in particular?"

"A clerk came down from the bank, the clerk who had paid the money on the—the third—and he described the person who had presented it, and old Mr. Waters had always hated Harry because he was my brother, and guessed at once. And of course he thought that Harry had—had—done every thing."

"Well? and then?"

"And then he sent for Austin, and told him. Ah! what a day that was—I could never forget it if I lived a thousand years. I was sitting with my poor eldest boy on my knee (I was better then, but he was wasting away under that dreadful fever day by day), and Austin came in—oh! so pale—and said he had something to speak to me about. And I had to come away from my poor dying child to listen, and he told me every thing, for he could not keep it from me longer—how wicked he had been, and how it must all be found out the moment Harry came back, and Harry was expected back every day. Oh! when I think of it all, I wonder how I can have lived through it! And then he went away like a madman, and never came back again all that day. I thought he had gone away to kill himself."

"But he did not kill himself. What did he do?"

"He went along the road that he thought Harry would come back by, trying to meet him."

"Yes, and he did meet him, I understand that already. And he asked him—"

"He asked him to keep out of the way so as not to be questioned about who gave him the—that horrible paper. He told him every thing—"

"I see, but not the one thing that it concerned him to know. Not that the person who presented that paper was suspected of being the person who forged it, and could only clear himself by telling the truth?"

Mrs. Waters lowered her eyes under Olivia's penetrating gaze.

"Do not be too hard upon him—my poor husband—" she pleaded. "He was thinking of me and the children—if he had been found out he would have been sent to prison, and we should have starved. Old Mr. Waters would have had no pity."

"Well, well, go on. So he—Harry" (it was the first time the name had passed Olivia's lips since the fatal day of discovery)—"he consented to keep away, I suppose, and by keeping away confirmed all suspicions?"

Mrs. Waters breathed a half-inaudible affirmative.

"But he found out afterwards what he had done?" went on Olivia.

"Yes, through the newspapers, but not for some days, and when he did he could not find

it in his heart—he would have had to come out from his hiding and say it was Austin who did it, you know, and Austin had been good to him once, and given him a home when he needed one. And I was his sister, too, and in such trouble, for we had just lost our boy, and the other children were following—our little girl died the same day we got Harry's letter."

"Harry's letter?"

"Yes, he wrote to say that he knew now what people thought of him, that it had cost him a great struggle, but that he had made up his mind. And then he promised that for my sake and the sake of the benefits Austin had done him, he would go on as he had begun, and help us to keep the secret till the end; he would give up for us his country and his name and every thing."

"And you and your husband did not refuse the offer?" asked Olivia sternly.

"What could we do? Poor Austin—for my sake and the children's he dared not speak; and I—you would not have had me betray my husband, surely? But oh! what I have suffered all these years—what we have both suffered, I mean—you would pity me if you knew."

"And he—Harry—have you never thought of what he must have suffered, bearing the burden of another man's disgrace?" said Olivia, trembling very much, partly with indignation, partly with—something else.

"Ah! it is thinking of that, and nothing but that, which has made me so miserable," cried Mrs. Waters, casting an appealing look at Olivia through her tears, as though entreating compassion. But Olivia was so occupied with her own emotions that the look was altogether lost on her, and, with a fiery light of resolution in her eyes, she rejoined:

"But the burden shall be taken off now. I know the truth at last, and it shall be my care that all the world shall know it too. Ah! thank God that I shall be able to do something for him after wronging him so!"

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Waters, "you would tell— Ah! no, no, for mercy's sake! My husband—you do not know—it will drive him mad."

"I can not help that. Justice must be done, and shall be done. Ah! Harry, how could I believe—"

"But Austin will kill himself. Oh! if you have any pity—if you have ever felt a grain of friendship— And what good is it to do? There is no disgrace now; nobody here knows he was my brother—not at least if you have kept our secret, as you said you would."

"That makes no difference; I choose that he shall be able to bear his own name again, and be proud of it. And you forget that one person has known all along—the person who told me. Do you imagine I will consent to have it thought even by one man that I ought to feel ashamed where I have most cause to feel honored?"

She made a step towards the door; evidently she had taken her determination, and was prepared to put it into immediate execution. Mrs. Waters saw that it was so, and clutched at her dress with the energy of despair.

"Miss Egerton—stay—one moment—for his sake—my brother's. You love him, I think! Ah yes! I see you do."

"I do," said Olivia, proudly; "I love him more than my own life."

"Then for his sake have mercy on my poor husband even as he had mercy. If you love him, don't undo what he has done—don't let his sacrifice be vain."

Olivia did not speak, but Mrs. Waters fancied that her manner showed symptoms of hesitation, and with passionate entreaty went on:

"If you tell, it would be better that he had never been silent. Austin might have lived through it then; but now, with all his grand new friends to talk about him, and poor Emmy—Ah! I know what he would do—he would kill himself, I know he would. And then all that Harry has done for us would be undone, and worse than undone, all his suffering and self-denial wasted. Oh! could you wish that? do you think that he could wish it?"

For a while Olivia was still mute, but her compressed lips and quivering eyelids showed that a violent struggle was taking place within her. At last she raised her eyes, and said, in a clear, steady voice:

"His sacrifice shall not be made vain through me. If he does not wish for his own sake that every thing should be told, I will not wish it for mine, no, nor even for his. I give you my word."

"Oh! Miss Egerton, dear Miss Egerton—"

"You owe me no thanks; it is for him, and him alone. What he has done I will not undo without his wish. And if others, not knowing the truth, despise and point at me, I will glory in being despised and pointed at for his sake."

"God bless you for loving him so, Olivia!"

"Yes, he shall see that I can make a sacrifice too. Let him be looked down upon and held disgraced by all the world: let me be looked down upon and held disgraced for loving him—it will be my privilege to give up something for him, after treating him as I did. But he shall not be looked down upon either—Randal shall have Egerton Park, and I can trust him to be silent enough; it was all of me that he wanted."

She spoke with strange contempt and bitterness; in the few minutes during which she had known of Harold Maxwell's innocence, Randal Egerton, without any fault of his own, had lost every jot of his laboriously acquired footing in her friendship, and even in her esteem. She paused, thinking with a shudder of what she had been so near doing that very morning, and presently resumed:

"And then we—Harry and I—shall go from England together, to India, or wherever he pleases—anywhere so that he be far enough away from all who knew us here—and live for each other and in each other; ah! what a happy life that will be!—if only he will forgive me, that is."

"If only he is living!" murmured Mrs. Waters in broken accents.

Olivia looked up in sudden fear; the words, and still more the tone of suppressed anguish in which they had been uttered, filled her with indescribable alarm.

"What do you mean? If he is living! what doubt—Ah yes; you came to ask me—you had never heard from him, you said. But what of that? It does not prove—Living! of course he is living; how dare you try to make me afraid?"

"Because—because I am so afraid myself,"

sobbed Mrs. Waters, unable longer to conceal the agony which her terror cost her.

"Afraid! why afraid? what are you afraid of?" said Olivia breathlessly. "Let me know every thing; the worst; it is my right."

"Perhaps all is well; perhaps I have no cause— But I am miserable, and I can not help it."

And then, with a great effort at self-composure, Mrs. Waters gave Olivia the whole history of her anxiety—how she had met her brother coming from Egerton House pale and haggard, and scarcely capable of coherent speech; how he had promised to write and had never written; how she had heard that his things were still lying unclaimed at the village inn; how for one weary day after another she had waited for a scrap of news of him in vain. As she spoke, she watched Olivia intently, in the hope of finding that the circumstances which carried such apprehension to her own mind did not appear equally suggestive of evil to another hearing them for the first time. But Olivia was listening with straining eyes, pale cheeks, and a look of intense anxiety that made the sister's heart turn cold within her.

"And what do you think then has become of him?" asked Olivia in a hoarse voice, when she had heard every thing.

"I don't know—I dare not think too much. He looked so ill, so different from himself: sometimes I am afraid something must have happened to him that very day—some accident or—worse than an accident, perhaps. He was not fit to be alone."

Olivia evidently understood all that was meant, for her pale face grew yet paler, and for some seconds she remained mute with dismay. After a while, recovering somewhat, she said:

"At least nothing happened quite immediately. I had something from him by post next evening."

"A letter!" cried Mrs. Waters, her eyes lighting up with a ray of new hope. "Ah! why did you not tell me—"

"No, not a letter," said Olivia sadly—"not a word of writing; he despised me too much for that. It was a ring I had given him once; he scorned to keep any thing of mine after what I had done, and no wonder."

"And what did he say? Where was he?"

"I tell you he said nothing. There was only the envelope addressed in his hand, and the ring wrapped up in a blank piece of paper inside."

"But there was a postmark, surely?"

"A postmark—yes, to be sure, a postmark!" cried Olivia feverishly. "I never noticed, but there must have been, of course. I will look now; I have it somewhere, I know."

And with trembling haste Olivia flew to a cabinet, into a drawer of which she remembered tossing the envelope and its inclosure immediately on receiving it. The very sight of such a memorial of Harold Maxwell had been abhorrent to her, and yet somehow she had not been able to bring herself to destroy it.

She had never ventured to open the drawer since that day, and laid her hand instantly on what she wanted.

"The postmark is Southampton," she announced presently.

"Southampton!" and a gleam of joy flickered

across Mrs. Waters's face. "He was on his way back to India, then? So perhaps it is true what Austin thinks; perhaps he had to leave in a hurry, and had no time— But surely he might have found some way of sending a letter afterwards. Oh! if only I could know something certain; I can not bear this cruel doubt longer. Is there any way of knowing, do you think?"

"The thing would be to ask at the shipping offices at Southampton. And I will go to ask this very day; before I lay my head on my pillow I must have news of him."

"I will go with you," said Mrs. Waters eagerly.

"And wherever he may have gone," continued Olivia, with impassioned energy—"wherever he may have gone I will follow, that I may ask him on my knees to pardon me and give me back his love. If I were to write to him and say that I was ready to leave England and this place for his sake, I know what he would answer—that he would not accept the sacrifice, as he would call it. But if I speak to him, if I see him face to face, and tell him I have decided—ah! he will not, he can not refuse then."

"Dear Olivia! dear sister!"

"Dear Agnes! Yes, you are my sister indeed—you are his, and I see you love him. Let us go then at once—you will go with me, I think you said?"

"Yes, to Southampton; I can not live longer without hearing of him."

"It will be a great comfort to have you. But you must come now—immediately; I can not wait."

"I will only return home and tell Austin where I am going, and then I will meet you at the station. There will be a train in about an hour, I think."

"That is enough; I will expect you. And now don't lose another instant; remember, if you are not there I must go alone."

But Mrs. Waters needed no exhortation to haste. She seized Olivia's hand and pressed it to her lips, then flew on the way towards home with an elasticity of step which more than any thing else showed that the capacity for hope was renewed within her.

Olivia went to prepare for her journey with a full heart—full of overflowing with exultant joy and tenderness, and yet also with strange, gnawing anxiety. Ah! when once she should find him, how happy she would be, how proud of him, how penitent, and yet how triumphant! Surely, in this world there would be no creature so blessed as herself.

When once she should find him!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

MRS. WATERS made her way home that day very quickly. She spent a few minutes up stairs in hasty preparation, and then, being ready for departure, descended to the library to seek her husband, not, however, without some little reluctance in the midst of her impatience. It was necessary that he should be told where she was going and with what object, and yet, as she thought of the explanation which such telling

might involve, she could not help feeling some dread of the interview.

He was alone in the room, pacing up and down with slow, thoughtful strides. At the sound of the opening door he came to a halt and looked round, when, seeing who was entering, he said, eagerly:

"Come in, Agnes; I have good news for you. Podmore says he is pretty sure now of being able to manage them—the creditors, you know. To-day will let half stand over on interest for three years, and, as he is the principal one, there is no doubt the others will do the same. Eh! that's good, isn't it?"

"Very good," said Mrs. Waters faintly, yet somewhat relieved by the momentary respite. "I am very glad to hear it."

"Glad! I should think so. And so it will come right with me, you see, after every thing said and done—with me and all of us, that is."

"I hope so, dear. But"—here, with an effort to surmount her hesitation, she made a few wavering steps forward—"but I have come to say good-bye. I am going away for a day or two."

"Going away!" he echoed, staring at her blankly.

"Yes, I am going to Southampton with Miss Egerton."

"Southampton!"

"Yes; it seems that Harry went there that day, and we want—"

"You have heard of him!" cried Austin, with a sudden huskiness in his voice. "Then he is not—I mean, then he is alive?"

"Ah! pray God he may be! But we know nothing yet, except that he went to Southampton that day; we are going to try to find out at the shipping offices. I hope—I hope—and yet, when I think how he has kept me all this time without a letter—"

She turned her head away, overcome with returning anxiety; else she might have noticed that while she had been speaking Austin's brow had become manifestly clearer. But presently, as he stood there meditating, his look grew troubled again, and after a short silence he asked, rather unsteadily:

"Miss Egerton—did you say Miss Egerton was going with you?"

"Yes, I am to meet her at the station," answered the wife, as calmly as she could, but with secret apprehension of what might be coming.

"But why should she care?" he asked again, looking very pale. "I thought she was so bitter—"

"People may be very bitter and repent afterwards. She was bitter once, but she loved him all the time, and it was only natural she should be softened towards him."

"And do you mean to say that she has forgiven—"

"She is going to ask him to forgive her. If he lives and we succeed in finding him, she will be his wife."

"You have told her?" asked Austin with a muffled cry, and his face became deadly white to the very lips, while his limbs shook under him as though palsied-smitten. "Oh! if I thought you had; if I thought—"

"Austin, dear Austin!" put in his wife imploringly.

"Have you told her? Yes or no, or I shall choke."

"It was not my fault," murmured Mrs. Waters in agony—"indeed it was not. She guessed it, and would not let me keep it back; if you had only heard the questions—"

"You have told her!" he cried, and a sudden change came over him which showed how imperfectly, till this moment, he had realized the full import of his suspicions. "You have!" He waved his arms wildly over his head, and, staggering backwards, sank faint and powerless into a chair, where, covering his eyes with his hands, he sat making such convulsive gasps for breath that his wife flew to his side in consternation.

"Austin, no, don't be afraid; you are safe—quite safe—you are, indeed. She has promised never to tell, promised solemnly. Ah! dear Austin, for Heaven's sake—No one shall ever hear—no one; she has given me her word, and you surely know her well enough to believe that she will never break it."

He did not answer, but his breathing became calmer and more equal, and she saw that she had succeeded to some extent in reassuring him.

"Ah yes! you do believe, dear Austin, I see you do. You know how I love you, you know how it would break my heart if any thing were said against you; then you may surely believe me when I tell you there is no danger. Dear, dear husband, you can not think I would deceive you."

She knelt down, and would have pressed her cheek against his, but he shrank from her touch, saying harshly:

"You do not love me; you hate me, and have done your best to kill me. I will not live to be pointed at, you know I will not."

He pushed her away sullenly. She was grieved and wounded, and yet felt comforted too; any thing was better than the depth of despairing terror into which he had been sunk just now.

"You shall not be pointed at, Austin. You have nothing to fear, take my word for it—nothing whatever."

He was evidently a good deal relieved, but he only shook his head moodily.

"It pleases you to say so," he muttered, with a spasmodic contraction of the fingers.

"I do not say so without good cause. I tell you Miss Egerton has promised solemnly that our secret shall be hers too—not for our sake, but his; she loves him, and she will not let his sacrifice be made vain. And what she promises to do for Harry's sake, that you may be sure she will do."

He made a movement of fretful impatience.

"Oh yes! for his sake—he is every thing with you all. You have betrayed me for his sake, and she will betray me too."

"No, she will not, believe me she will not; but indeed I see you almost believe me already. She has expressly promised never to tell except by his leave, so you may understand how safe you are."

"I don't know about that," said Austin, half nervously, half peevishly. "He would have told long ago, I dare say, only he had not the courage to break such a promise as he made us; and if he can get somebody else to tell for him, he will be only *too glad, perhaps.*"

"I think you might know him better than that by this time, after all he has done for us."

"After all he has done for us! And what has he done so very great, pray? He only thought at the time he was keeping back a little evidence; he did not intend to suffer himself—not he. And if he did suffer a little, as it turned out, I'm sure I've been grateful enough, grateful till I'm tired, and so I tell you. I'm not going to be down on my knees before him all my life just because he did me a favor once; and it was the least he could do for me, goodness knows, after all I had done for him first."

"Oh! Austin, how can you speak like that—so ungenerously, so ungratefully?"

"Ungratefully; I tell you I won't be grateful any longer, I have nothing to be grateful for. If he wished me to be grateful, why did he come back where he was not wanted? how dared he show his face among our friends to bring disgrace and ruin on our heads? Grateful, indeed—I hate him."

Mrs. Waters recoiled as though she had been struck; then, turning away, commented with mournful bitterness:

"If you can say that, I have nothing to answer."

"Well, well, perhaps I did not mean quite that—of course I did not. But you can not wonder much. Only to think of all the benefits I heaped upon him once, and now to be repaid by being brought to shame before all the world—my own child—"

He paused, shuddering.

She looked at him reproachfully, yet half-compassionately as well.

"How often am I to tell you that there is not the slightest danger? If you do not believe me, you can see Miss Egerton if you like; she will tell you the same."

"How dare you? What! ask me to see Miss Egerton—to talk to Miss Egerton about—" Again he shuddered; then, looking up with a sudden flashing of the eye, he exclaimed fiercely: "If I were to see Miss Egerton, I would tell her it was all a lie."

"Oh! Austin, what is the use of speaking so?" said Mrs. Waters with pitying expostulation, but feeling a little startled nevertheless.

"But I would," he rejoined more deliberately, and, as though gaining new strength from the idea, he rose and made a few paces to and fro. "And if you don't take care what you do, I will; yes, I am not sure but that I will, even as it is. My word is worth as much as yours, at all events."

"You will find she loves him far too well to believe you."

"I am not so sure of that. And even supposing she does not believe me herself, she will have the sense to see that other people would believe me if she dared to come out with her story. Yes, I will. I will tell her that you did not know what you were saying, that you are so fond of him—You may contradict me again afterwards if you like, but nobody will believe you without proofs, and you know very well you have got none."

Mrs. Waters had grown very pale while her husband was speaking, but as he ceased the color began to return slightly to her cheeks, and she drew a long breath, as though reassured.

"You are mistaken," she answered, with a look of stern defiance quite new to her face. "I have a proof which will convince any body, and if you do what you say I will produce it."

He started, and fell back a step or two, looking very blank; then, recovering himself with a visible effort, he smiled, and said, faintly:

"I don't believe you. What proof?"

"The letter which you wrote to Harry when you sent him the—you know what—and asked him to bring the money for it."

Again he started, and an ashy whiteness overspread his face. But again he controlled himself sufficiently to force his quivering lips into a smile while he articulated:

"That letter—I don't believe you; how could you come by it? No, it is impossible—I don't believe you."

"You will soon understand how I came by it. Do you not remember that when Harry went away for his journey in Wales he left his things here for us to take care of?"

Austin uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"Ah! that shows what a lie you are telling. And don't you remember that Uncle Gilbert took every thing away when—when he found out? How could you have got hold of a letter or any thing else? Ah! I knew it was a lie—all a lie."

"It is all truth. Your uncle did not take every thing of Harry's away—he thought he did, but he did not. There was a writing-case which I had hidden; I did not know then what was in it, but I did not choose that my brother's private papers should be read by that cruel old man."

Austin did not speak, but the moisture that had suddenly started on his forehead showed how deeply he was agitated. Meanwhile his wife continued:

"And a few months afterwards, when Harry was in India, he wrote (you might remember it if you had taken notice at the time)—he wrote asking me to send him our mother's portrait, which was in the desk he had left with us. You did not know I had the desk at all, and I did not tell you even then for fear of your uncle discovering; but as soon as I could I opened it, and found the portrait, and sent it myself to Harry. And as I was looking over the papers and old letters to see if there was any thing else that Harry might like to have, I came upon—what I have told you of already."

Austin groaned, but still did not answer; it was evident that he was only too well convinced of the truth of his wife's statement.

"I thought of destroying it," she went on in a breaking voice, "but I could not; I felt that it would be like treason to take away the proof of his innocence. And yet for your sake I hated it so. I have had it in my hand two or three times since then to tear it up, but I always stopped myself. So I kept it—I have it still; and oh! how thankful I am that it is so!"

He stood looking at her in silent bewilderment, then, shaking himself violently out of his lethargy, he sprang forward with a loud cry, and clutched her roughly by the arm.

"Give me that letter!" he vociferated, and drew her towards him so fiercely that she blanched with pain and fear. "That letter—that letter, instantly!"

She felt herself tremble from head to foot, but,

summoning all her strength, looked him steadily in the face, and with apparent calmness answered:

"No. You may kill me if you like, but while I live that letter you shall not have."

He tightened his grasp yet further, and glared at her with such an aspect of maniacal fury that she was ready to swoon with terror—terror for him yet more than for herself. But still she looked at him unflinchingly, and in a moment more he relaxed his hold, and, reeling like a drunken man, retreated a few steps backward to the table, leaning heavily against it to save himself from falling. She felt as though they had both escaped some dire impending calamity.

She waited a little to recover breath; then, seeing him still stand as one whose whole strength of body and mind is shattered, said soothingly:

"You have no cause to be afraid. I do not choose to give you that letter because I should feel that I was doing a wrong to Harry, but it will never be seen by any one except through your own fault. If you are only content to trust, every thing will be as though no scrap of proof were in existence, and after what I have said you may be content to trust, surely. Miss Egerton has promised never to tell what she knows except with Harry's permission; and even if he lives and if we find him, you may be sure that his permission will never be given."

The words were uttered with a tranquil deliberation more calculated than perhaps any thing else to appease violent unreasoning agitation, and even as she spoke she had the satisfaction of seeing him become calmer. His breath came and went more regularly; he took his hands from the table and stood erect an instant as though to test his strength; then, feebly indeed, but no longer reeling as before, moved to a chair and seated himself with an air almost of composure.

"Has any one besides you ever seen it?" he asked presently.

"No one, I declare to you, no one," said Mrs. Waters emphatically, only too glad to be able to answer something to reassure him. "No one has so much as seen the outside of the desk where it is kept—except, indeed, once Emmy," she added, correcting herself.

"Emmy! But you did not tell Emmy what—"

"How can you think of such a thing? She only saw the desk, and I did not even tell her whom it had belonged to."

He seemed relieved, and remained silent a little time as though reflecting; it was manifest that he was fast regaining his self-possession.

"I am very glad to hear you have been so careful, Agnes. And this desk, where do you keep it, then?"

He looked up keenly as he put the question—so keenly that, hardly knowing why, his wife suppressed the straightforward answer which was already almost on her tongue, and responded evasively:

"I keep it where it is quite safe, you need not be afraid. But I must go now; we have to be in Southampton this evening."

"Where is the hurry? Stay a little longer; I want to ask you—"

She stopped him hastily, with an instinctive avoidance of interrogation.

"I can not wait. Miss Egerton wants me to

help her to find out about Harry. She is impatient—and I am impatient too.”

She moved forward to leave the room. Austin half rose from his chair as though to detain her, but he found himself weaker than he expected, and fell back again.

“I believe you care for that man more than you do for me,” he muttered querulously as she passed him.

She said nothing, but went straight to the door. The patient forbearance with which her love and her pity had so long inspired her had at last well-nigh given way to contempt for his selfishness and cowardice, and at that moment she was conscious of a coldness towards him such as she had never felt before—such coldness that, as she heard him accuse her of caring for her brother more than for himself, something rebellious rose up within her and told her that he was right. Had not her brother deserved far more at her hands?

She had already opened the door, and, with this rebellious feeling at her heart, was in the act of passing out of the room, when an accidental look round showed her the broken-down figure of her husband sitting despondingly where she had left him, with the light shining full on his scant grizzled hair, and on that furrowed brow which she remembered so smooth and joyous. At the sight there came over her an irresistible impulse of self-reproachful tenderness. She turned quickly back, and, going up to him almost before he was aware of it, cast her arms fondly round him and pressed a kiss on his cheek.

“Dear Austin, say good-bye to me. You know I love you better than any creature in the world.”

As he felt her embrace he drew her towards him, and kissed her passionately.

“Good-bye,” he said, and this time his voice did not sound querulously, but was more like her husband’s than she had heard it for months.

She could have staid with him for hours longer, but every moment was of consequence, and with one last pressure of the hand she tore herself away, her heart aching with a compassionate love of which just before she could not have believed herself capable. But though that farewell had cost her a pang which she might otherwise have spared herself, she was glad that she had gone back to say it. The time came when she had still more reason to be glad.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE TRACK.

THE winter evening had long closed in when, amidst a storm of wind and rain which made the station lamps glimmer with uncertain light through a hazy veil of damp that penetrated everywhere, the two fellow-travellers from Chorcombe alighted at Southampton. The journey had been very trying to both, not so much from its length as from the anxiety on which it gave them leisure to brood, and which only became more oppressive as they neared their destination. But, wearied as they were in mind no less than in body, neither felt inclined to rest. The first condition of rest was the definitive intelligence which they had come so far to seek; and, having ascertained the address of the agents from whom they would be most likely to obtain news

of the missing man, supposing them to be right in their conjectures as to his movements, they started on their way thither without delay.

Little or nothing was said between them as they drove through the wet, dark streets—dark save for an unsteady flicker from lamps and shop-lights, which only served to remind them the more of the inclemency of the night and of the unfamiliarity of their surroundings. Suspense generally grows more tormenting as the time approaches for deciding it; and partly from the fatigue of the journey, partly from the gloomy aspect of every thing about them—the wet pavements shining darkly under the gaslights, the dimly-seen figures of men and women hurrying along the half-deserted streets in quest of shelter—both Mrs. Waters and Olivia felt the spirit of hope much less strong within them than it had been when they left home. Neither of them could have very well said what it was that she feared, but an undefinable sense of dread and despondency settled more and more heavily upon each. It has been seen how impatient they had been to make their inquiries that evening, and yet, when at last the fly stopped, and they found that they were expected to alight, both were conscious of feeling that they would have liked to delay, if possible, a little longer.

But it was too late for hesitation now; the critical moment had arrived, and they were obliged to face it. Olivia was the first to descend, and, bidding the driver await their return, gave her arm to her trembling companion, whom she led forward to the place where a half-open door showed the way into an obscurely-lighted passage.

Somebody whom they could not see was fumbling at the inner handle of the door as they came up. Olivia tapped gently, and immediately a round bullet-head, with an upright shock of hair, and sharp, youthful features, presented itself in the opening.

“No admittance to-night, miss,” said a juvenile but very decided voice. “Office just closed.”

Olivia had been shrinking from the necessity of immediate action, and yet now the prospect of waiting till to-morrow seemed unendurable.

“We have called on very particular business,” she said imploringly. “Pray do not send us away; we will not detain you long.”

The round bullet-head was shaken inexorably.

“We don’t do no more business to-night. It ain’t a bit of good asking.”

Olivia looked at her friend in despair. What were they to do? Suddenly a bright idea occurred to her, and taking out her purse she turned once more towards the door.

“Here are five shillings for you, my good boy. Will you let us in now?”

The youth eyed the proffered coin very longingly, but still hesitated. Presently he held out his hand, and said:

“I’ll see what I can do for you, if you like. But I don’t expect it’s any use.”

“Try,” said Olivia, and dropped the money into his hand, which instantly closed upon it very tightly.

The ladies were straightway admitted, but no farther than the passage, where they were left standing while their conductor went forward to a glass door opening into the office.

“If you please, sir, here are two ladies want-

ing to see you on very particular business," they heard him say.

"No business done to-night," answered a voice inside—a voice which to the applicants without sounded very gruff and formidable. "Let them call again to-morrow."

"I told them so, sir, but they were so set on coming in that I thought I might as well mention it. They seem very nice ladies, sir."

"Let them call again to-morrow," repeated the gruff voice.

The boy was retiring with his answer when, on turning to leave the room, he found the two ladies confronting him on the threshold.

"Pray do not refuse us," entreated Olivia, addressing herself to a little gray-headed, black-eyed man of somewhat stern and uncompromising appearance, who was in the act of locking up a huge safe as she presented herself. "We have only come to ask one question, and if you knew what suspense we are suffering—"

"The office was closed five minutes ago," was the obdurate response. "We never do business after-hours."

"Please don't send us away without an answer," said Olivia appealingly. "We would have called sooner, but we have been travelling a long way, and have only just arrived. And we are so unhappy, so anxious—both of us," she added, with a look of tender solicitude at her companion, whose arm she felt trembling within her own.

The little man scrutinized both his visitors very attentively, but with a look so stern and unsympathizing that Olivia felt all petition to be unavailing in such a quarter.

"We never do business after-hours," he repeated stolidly. "What was it you were going to ask?"

Olivia was taken quite by surprise at the question.

"There is a—a friend of ours," she answered in sudden embarrassment—"this lady's brother, in fact—we wish to know if he has sailed for India, for Bombay, because if not— Ah no! Agnes, pray."

"Because if not, he must be dead," broke out his sister with a sob, which she could not repress.

The little man looked at her again very narrowly, then brought back his scrutiny to bear with equal attention on Olivia.

"It is quite against the rule for us to answer questions after the hour of closing," he said dogmatically. "About what time do you think this friend of yours started?"

"About the beginning of this month. Oh! if you would only be so kind—"

"And what is his name?"

"The name is Graham," said Olivia, turning all at once from pale to red. "Oh! how are we ever to thank you!" she exclaimed, as the little man reached down a large volume and began fluttering over the leaves.

"It is quite against the rule. Graham, you say—about the beginning of this month—to Bombay." He turned over a few leaves slowly, while Olivia held her breath with suspense. "Here is the name Graham, I see—passage taken out on the 4th; would that be about the time?"

"The very day he left us!" cried Olivia, with a burst of joy and thankfulness.

"We must remember that Graham is not an uncommon name," cautiously put in the little man, noticing something of her ecstasy. "I see the Christian name is Henry; is that what you expected?"

"Yes. Oh! thank you, thank you a thousand times!"

"And the address was Petchley's Family Hotel; is that right?"

"I don't know any thing about that, but the name is enough. Henry Graham—on the 4th—oh yes! we have found him, there can be no doubt."

"He is far enough out of England by this time, you must understand," said the little man, again making a benevolent endeavor to moderate what must have seemed to him her unreasoning excess of gladness. "The ship he booked by was to sail on the 7th."

"Oh! but that makes no difference; it is he, and that is enough. Dear Agnes, you are comforted now, are you not?"

Mrs. Waters did not speak a word. The load of doubt and fear which for weeks had been pressing on her so heavily was abruptly withdrawn, and she was almost giddy with joyfulness. But what she could not say her look sufficiently interpreted.

Olivia again expressed her thanks to the little man, who received them tolerably graciously, with only a muttered allusion to the rule of answering no questions after business hours. The two friends took leave, and once again found themselves in the darkness which had looked so ominously dreary a little while ago, but which scarcely looked dreary at all now.

"Where to, ladies?" said the driver, holding open the door of his fly as they prepared to re-enter.

Olivia paused; the question of what was to be their next destination had not yet occurred to her.

"Petchley's Family Hotel," she answered with sudden decision.

It was necessary that they should rest somewhere in the town that night, and she instinctively chose that the place which had once sheltered her lover should shelter her. Besides, was it not possible that there they might obtain some further tidings?

The fly rattled on through the dark streets (the same streets, some of them, through which it had passed before, and yet how different they seemed now!), stopping at last in front of an open door, above which were painted, in large letters lighted by a flaring gas-lamp, the words, "Petchley's Family Hotel."

Petchley's Family Hotel was a large building situated in one of the main thoroughfares of the town, not so large as to come within the category of the high caravansaries where the guest's name is merged in his number and the landlord's individuality evaporates in a Board of Directors, yet large enough to be quite unlike the old-fashioned hostleries where each separate guest is made to feel himself of consequence to the welfare of the concern, and is petted and fussed over, on arrival and departure, with a show almost of personal regard.

Mrs. Waters and Olivia, arriving at this well-ordered establishment, were not fussed over, by any means, but received with a great deal of

stately decorum and formality. A white-cravatted middle-aged head-waiter first appeared, and ordered an underling to see after the ladies' luggage; and before the visitors had time to say that they had no luggage to see after, a sumptuous personage rustling in moire antique, who might have been a duchess, but was only the landlady, came forward to ask what accommodation was required. On being answered board and lodging till next morning, this haughty dame retired, perhaps all the sooner that she perceived no luggage to be forthcoming, handing the visitors over to the escort of a chambermaid. If she had been a landlady of a different type, they would probably not have gone up stairs without trying to engage her in conversation about a certain recent guest of hers; but with so magnificent a person they felt that all gossip would be out of place, and, though not without a sense of disappointment, meekly followed their allotted guide.

They duly looked at the rooms awarded them, and were presently installed, as comfortably as circumstances permitted, in a large and somewhat chilly sitting-room, where the middle-aged head-waiter made tea for them, while his subordinate, down on his knees before the grate, endeavored to coax a handful of damp sticks into a blaze.

"Shall I put any green in, ma'am?" asked the waiter at the tea-table, appealing to Olivia as the person who had hitherto given all the orders.

"Just as you like," said Olivia carelessly; "it is all the same."

"Some parties are so much prepossessed against green tea," explained the waiter apologetically. "But for my own part, I think it makes a wonderful refreshing beverage after a journey."

Olivia looked at the man more attentively than she had yet done. He was very precise and formal in his external get-up, as accorded with the dignity of head-waiter at such an establishment; but there was a weather-beaten look of long service in his face, and a general air of conciliation in his manner, which reminded one that after all he was only a fellow-creature obliged to work probably pretty hard for his living, and doubtless standing in as much awe of the superb lady down stairs as any one else. Altogether he looked a great deal more approachable than his mistress, and Olivia felt emboldened to remark:

"I suppose in this house you have a great deal to do with people on their way out to India or the colonies?"

"Oh dear, yes, ma'am, and coming home too. It is quite surprising really how many of such parties we see; as I often say, unless one witnessed it with one's own eyes one wouldn't hardly credit it."

He closed the lid of the tea-pot with great elaboration, lingering still to give it a last polishing touch with his napkin; evidently he was in very conversable humor. Olivia hesitated a moment, and then ventured tremulously to inquire:

"Do you remember a gentleman of the name of Graham coming here three or four weeks ago?"

The waiter shook his head dubiously, and, giving a parting flick to the tea-pot with his napkin as though he expected to touch up his memory by the same process, answered deliberately:

"A gentleman of the name of Graham? Can't

say I do, ma'am, really. But we have so many coming and going, you see, in a house like this."

"Oh yes, to be sure; but still I thought that perhaps—I have reason to know that the gentleman came to this hotel."

"Oh! no doubt about that, ma'am—quite enough that you say so, of course. But you have no idea of the number of parties that come here, you haven't indeed," and the tone of the waiter's voice was positively compassionate.

"He was on his way out to India," persisted Olivia, hoping to assist her interlocutor's memory by details. "It was about the beginning of the month that he came—the 4th, it must have been."

The waiter considered very hard, but still shook his head.

"I don't know, I'm sure, ma'am. The name of Graham, did you say?"

"Yes. He can only have been with you two or three days, for he sailed on the 7th."

The waiter was evidently inclined to do his best, but still looked desponding.

"George, do you remember seeing the name of Graham on a gentleman's luggage any time this month?" he inquired of the subordinate at the fire-side.

The person addressed looked up from his sticks and reflected, apparently as much puzzled as his superior.

"The gentleman had no luggage," put in Mrs. Waters in eager correction. "He had left every thing behind him."

George drew a greasy sleeve across his forehead by way of brightening up his wits, and then said, tentatively:

"P'raps the lady means the gen'l'man as came one evening without any luggage, and said he was going to send for his things next day. That was this month, I think."

"Yes," said Mrs. Waters feverishly. "Tall, with dark hair and eyes?"

"I believe so," assented George thoughtfully.

"And he said something about going to India, I know."

"Why, that was the gentleman that was taken ill, wasn't it?" said the head-waiter.

"Taken ill!" cried Olivia, with a pang of terror. "What do you mean?"

Mrs. Waters said nothing, but she turned pale and cold as marble.

"There was a gentleman taken very ill here some three or four weeks ago," explained the head-waiter, "just about the beginning of the month, as you say, ma'am. I don't know his name, really, but I'm pretty sure he was going to India—indeed I think when he came he said he had just been taking out his passage."

"He was ill, you say?" panted Olivia. "And what—where is he now? what—" She paused for breath, unable to frame her question more precisely.

"I couldn't say any thing for certain, ma'am. The doctor was fetched as soon as we found out, and I believe he said it was something very bad, fever or something like that, for Mrs. Petchley had him moved out of the house directly—in case it should be catching, you know, and I dare say it was, for he was quite out of his mind, talking all sorts of things."

"And now?" articulated Olivia. It was all she could say, but her manner sufficiently showed the intensity of her interest.

"I am sorry to say I don't know, ma'am," was the deprecating answer. "I remember hearing a day or two afterwards that he was very ill, but there is so much to think of in this house, you see, that really— Would you like to speak to Mrs. Petchley about it?"

With difficulty Olivia made a gesture of assent.

"Go and ask Mrs. Petchley to step this way a minute, George," commanded the head-waiter, whose curiosity was by this time so far roused that he was unwilling to absent himself just as a crisis seemed to be approaching.

George left the room, and the head-waiter, perceiving that the ladies were both too much agitated to address him, and yet feeling it necessary as an excuse for his remaining that something should be said, went on:

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, ladies, to have mentioned any thing to make you uneasy. But who knows, perhaps this is not the gentleman you were inquiring about, after all. We will hope it was some one else who was taken ill, and I dare say it may have been."

"Tell us something more," said Olivia faintly. "You remember him, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! I remember him quite well, now that I come to think. He was a tall dark gentleman just as you say, and I recollect noticing at the time that he seemed rather strange in his manner—as if he couldn't properly fix his thoughts down to any thing, as it were."

"Go on. Did he say nothing about where he had come from—nothing about his friends?"

"Nothing at all, ma'am, I am quite certain. He seemed to be very anxious about some letters that he wanted to write, for I remember him calling for pen and paper in a great hurry. But he didn't seem to do much with it when he got it; I was in the coffee-room most of the evening, and there he was, sitting with the pen in his hand, looking first one way and then another, and never making a stroke, for what I could see. And at last he got up and pushed every thing away from him, just as if he couldn't try longer. I remember thinking to myself how tired he looked, and you see the fever must have been coming on at that very time, for it was only next morning we found him with his head so bad."

"You are quite sure, then, that he did not send away any letter?" said Olivia, thinking of the packet which she had received from her lover next day, and half hoping that the person spoken of by the waiter might not be he after all.

"Well, there was something or other he put in the post before going to bed, I think, for I recollect he asked very particularly where the post-office was, and would go out himself, though I offered to send. But I couldn't say if it was a letter exactly—I think it was more a little parcel or such like, for I noticed him doing up something very careful in a bit of paper; it went through my head that perhaps his luggage was locked up and he was sending the key for it."

Olivia was silent, but she felt her heart turn cold with dismay. Then it had been really he!

"These are all the circumstances I can call to mind just now, ma'am," continued the waiter meditatively, for he saw how much interested his listeners were, and wished to do his best to deserve well of them. "It is only a wonder I took so much notice as I did; but I was struck with

the poor gentleman looking so ill, and was of course particularly anxious to do all, in my power to make him comfortable. And I can assure you, ladies, the care I took of him until Mrs. Petchley had him removed— Oh! here is Mrs. Petchley."

A rustling was heard on the landing and immediately afterwards the lady in moire antique sailed into the room, with something in her manner which, if not exactly defiant, was at least calculated to suggest that she was prepared to stand very jealously on the defensive.

"I understand you have been making inquiries about a gentleman who came to this house some time ago suffering from an attack of fever," she said as she entered, speaking before there was time for any one to anticipate her.

"What have you done with him?" asked Olivia in an unsteady voice. "Where—" and she stopped, absolutely afraid of going on.

"I am very glad indeed to have an opportunity of seeing somebody belonging to him," was the reply, given with a great deal of dignified composure. "The expenses incurred have of course been very considerable, and as we have only had a few pounds which we found in his purse to meet them—"

"Why can you not tell me something?" interrupted Olivia impetuously. "Is he better? is he worse? why don't you tell me?"

"I really scarcely know how he may be at present," said the lady, drawing herself up with majestic resentment of this vehemence. "When last I heard I believe he was still considered in danger, but probably if any thing had happened—"

"Where is he?" demanded Olivia peremptorily. She felt partially relieved of her worst fears, but for that very reason was more eagerly impatient than ever.

"I had him removed to lodgings in the neighborhood immediately on finding what was the matter—of course, in prudence, I could do nothing else. And as I was saying, I am very glad to see some one connected with him, for there was not more than thirty pounds or so in his purse, and the expenses—"

"The expenses would not have been grudged if they had been thirty times thirty pounds. Where is he? what is the address?"

"I am certain he has been paid every attention to," said Mrs. Petchley, more deferentially than she had yet spoken. "They are very respectable lodgings, and I gave particular directions that every care should be taken."

"Where is he?" repeated Olivia, trembling with impatience.

"21 Clark's Buildings is the address," answered the landlady, a little reluctantly. "Shall we send to see how the gentleman is going on, ma'am?"

"No, we will go ourselves," returned Olivia decisively, and she went up to offer her hand to Mrs. Waters, who, faint with agitation and alarm, had sat listening to what was being said, almost bereft of the power of moving. "Come, Agnes, let us make haste."

"Call a fly for the ladies directly," said the hostess, and then, turning toward her guests as the waiter departed on his errand, she added in tones almost of apology: "I am very sorry not to be able to give you any more positive information,

but lately I have been so busy that really I have had no time—in an establishment like this, you know— But if any thing serious had happened the woman of the house would have been sure to tell me. What, will you not sit down a moment till the fly comes?"

Olivia made no answer, and, holding her friend's arm pressed tightly to her side, passed out of the room without vouchsafing another look at the magnificent landlady. On reaching the bottom of the stairs they found a fly already at the door, and in another minute they were once more on their way through the rain and the darkness; this time, however, in a state of suspense which, though hope was largely mixed with their fear, was perhaps harder to bear than any they had suffered yet. They were about to hear definitive tidings at last, but of what kind would those tidings be?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FOUND.

AFTER a few minutes of mute suspense, during which nothing was heard save the rattle of wheels over the stones of ill-paved streets, the two friends found themselves entering a straight dimly-lighted lane, formed by a high dead wall on one side and a row of shabby one-storied dwellings on the other. This was the row known as Clark's Buildings, and, after some trouble in finding the right house, the driver pulled up in front of No. 21, a shabby one-storied dwelling like the rest, with nothing except the fact of its being No. 21 to distinguish it from its neighbors. Here the ladies alighted, and after a little waiting were confronted by a hard-featured and somewhat angular-looking woman, who, presenting herself at the door with a candle in her hand, let its light fall on them as fully as possible, while she inquired with rather acid politeness what they pleased to want.

Mrs. Waters turned to Olivia, who had hitherto been spokeswoman. But Olivia now said nothing; at this decisive moment, when she was perhaps close to her lover, when certainly she was about to hear tidings of him, a sense of anxious dread, mingled at the same time with something not unlike shyness, had taken possession of her, and kept her from uttering a word. She looked appealingly at Mrs. Waters, who, finding herself compelled to speak for both, asked faintly:

"Is Mr. Graham here?"

"Mr. who?" said the woman sharply.

"Mr. Graham—a gentleman who was taken ill at Patchley's Hotel; they sent him to this house, did they not?"

"Oh! that's what you have come about?" said the woman, and perhaps because she was by this time favorably impressed by her scrutiny of the visitors' dress and appearance, perhaps because she considered their inquiry as constituting a sufficient introduction, she became a good deal more gracious. "Yes, this is the house, sure enough, and dreadfully ill he was, poor gentleman, I can tell you."

"But he is better now?" said Mrs. Waters, and she asked the question as beseechingly as though the answer she was to hear depended on the will of her interlocutor.

"Oh yes! he is better now and doing nicely. But the trouble we have had—you wouldn't believe it hardly. I thought at one time we never could have brought him through."

For some seconds neither of the two friends was able to speak; the revulsion from fear to joy was almost more than they could bear. And even when Olivia began to recover breath after the first shock of gladness, she was still tongue-tied. The tormenting dread was gone; but that peculiar sensation of shyness remained, and had increased tenfold.

"Where is he?" said Mrs. Waters at length.

"Where? Why, in his own room, to be sure, up stairs. Bless you, if you had seen how ill he was, you wouldn't think of him being anywhere else yet a while. He has got up for a bit this evening, to write some letter he was worrying about, but it's the first time he has been out of bed at all."

Again there was an interval of silence, and then, in a wavering voice, Mrs. Waters asked:

"Do you think we might see him?"

"Well, I should think so; but I'll go and ask, if you like. Who shall I say it is, ma'am?"

"Say that Mrs. Waters and— No, say nothing about the other lady; I will tell him that myself. Say that Mrs. Waters wants to see him—and mind, nothing just now about any one else."

"Yes, ma'am. I shall be sure to do it right."

So saying the woman passed up stairs, and the friends were again alone. Mrs. Waters looked at Olivia, and seeing how violently she was agitated, could not but feel some apprehension as to the effect of the coming meeting upon her brother.

"He must not know you are here at first; I will break it to him gradually. You can come up stairs with me, but you must wait outside till I call you. Do you understand?"

Olivia made a sign of assent; she was not able to do more. Just then the woman came down stairs.

"Oh yes! he will see you; it has put him quite in a flurry only to hear the name. The front bedroom door, right before you as you get to the top; but won't you let me show you up?"

"There is no need," said Mrs. Waters, abruptly passing towards the staircase. It was evident from her manner that she wished to dispense with the proffered service, and, after a brief hesitation between natural curiosity and a desire of pleasing people who seemed to be worth pleasing, the woman acquiesced, and slowly retreated towards the kitchen.

Meanwhile Mrs. Waters made her way up the narrow carpetless stairs. Olivia followed close behind, quivering with expectation in every nerve, and yet in a kind of dream all the time.

The door at the top of the stairs was standing ajar, so that, though nothing could be seen of the room itself, a dim yellow ray from within shone on the landing, yet further increasing the intensity of Olivia's expectation. Mrs. Waters made a motion to her to remain where she was, and then, pushing open the door gently, entered the room. For an instant Olivia had a vision of a barely-furnished chamber, with a figure that she knew sitting at a table in the midst; but before she was able to discern more through the haze that rose half-blinding to her eyes, the door again swung upon its hinges, and she once more

found herself in outer darkness, with only that dim yellow ray to light it up.

"Agnes!" said a voice within, and the sound of that voice, broken and feeble though it was, sent such a thrill through Olivia's veins that she could scarcely stand.

"Harry! my brother! my own Harry!" cried Mrs. Waters, and then there was a confused sound of sobs and kisses, and the listener knew that the sister had fallen weeping into the brother's arms.

For some time no word was spoken in the room, but at length the sister's voice was heard, half drowned in tears.

"I never thought to see you again, Harry. When you did not write I was afraid—ah! you may think what I was afraid of. Oh! what I have suffered! but it is all made up at last."

"My poor dear Agnes! but I could not help it. I have been ill, very ill; this is the first day— And see, I was writing to you now."

"You were! Ah! I knew you could not forget me—I knew it. And it was that which made me so miserable, when I waited and waited, and no letter came."

"It was not my fault. I tried to write to you that night, but could not; the thoughts would not come—except one thought that was driving me mad. There, that will do; it will drive me mad again if I let it come back. How have you found me? What brought you down to this place—not to look for me, surely?"

"Ah! Harry, what else should it be? We knew you had gone to Southampton, and we came down—I came down, that is—to see if I could find you, and I went to the hotel where you had been, and the people sent us here—sent me here. And oh! to have found you—I hardly know how to bear the joy of it."

"Agnes! my own Agnes! how you love me! I did not know there was any one in the world to care for me so; it makes life easier to bear to find that there is one—yes, though only one."

The last words were spoken in a low tremulous voice which made Olivia's heart ache to the very core. A wild impulse rose up within her to rush forward and tell him that he was mistaken—an impulse which was only with difficulty repressed, and not so much by the sense of shyness which had helped to keep her silent a while ago, as by the fear of harming him by showing herself too suddenly.

There was a pause, during which Olivia was conscious of a feeling of impatience which almost amounted to anger. How dared his sister hear him speak such words and not instantly undeceive him?

But perhaps Mrs. Waters had only been considering the best way of undeceiving him, for presently she said:

"Not only one, dear Harry, do not say that. But indeed you would not, if you knew who has been helping me to find you."

Olivia held her breath to listen for the question which she expected that those words must elicit. But apparently he was too indifferent on the subject to care about following it up, for after some moments of silence Mrs. Waters spoke again.

"Who do you think it was that helped me, dear?"

"Austin, I suppose; it was very good of him."

"No, not Austin," and the answer was made with something like a sigh. "No, it was somebody else; can you not guess?"

"How should I guess?" he said, but his voice had all at once become very hoarse. "Who was it?"

"I think you might guess if you tried, Harry."

"Who was it?"

"Ah! surely you know now who I mean. It was Olivia."

"Olivia!" he ejaculated, with a cry so full of pain that the listener had again to make a struggle to restrain herself.

"Yes, Olivia; I went to ask her if she knew where you had gone, and—"

"You went to ask her!" he cried reproachfully.

"You dared to go before her with my name in your mouth! you dared— Oh! it was cruel, cruel! When all I prayed for was to be forgotten by her!"

His voice was that of a man racked with shame and anguish. Olivia heard and suffered scarcely less than he; but still with an effort she kept silence, and strained her ears to listen for what her friend might answer.

"You could not be forgotten by her," she heard Mrs. Waters say, and inwardly blessed her for the words. "She loves you too well to forget you, be sure of that."

"Loves me!" he echoed, "thinking of me what she thinks!" And he laughed a laugh of such supreme bitterness that Olivia might not have been able to abstain from throwing herself at his feet to implore pardon, if Mrs. Waters, alarmed by the excess of his agitation, had not made haste to reply:

"She does not think what you mean; she knows better now; she knows the whole truth. Yes, Harry, the whole truth, and she loves you with all her heart and soul."

There was a sound of convulsive breathing, and then, in a low preternaturally composed voice, he answered:

"I know what it is—the fever coming back. I have sometimes dreamed of this before—when I was ill; and I understand now what it means—I will not let myself be disappointed."

"Harry, no, you are in your perfect mind, and what I say is real, I swear it to you. Olivia knows every thing; she loves you better even than before, and if you will not believe me, she shall tell you so herself."

"Tell me herself! Ah! now I know that I am dreaming."

"You are not dreaming; she has come with me—it was she that found you, not I. She is here now—in this town—almost close at hand—within call. Yes, Harry, she is in this very house."

A moment of dead silence followed, and then his voice broke out, confused and almost inarticulate with excitement.

"Is it true? can it really— Take care, take care—if you have deceived me, I must die."

"I have not deceived you; she shall come herself and show you that I have not. Olivia!"

Olivia laid her shaking hand on the door and pushed it slowly open—slowly, for the nervous shyness had come back, and she who just before had hardly been able to keep herself from falling at her lover's feet, had now scarcely courage to drag herself into his presence. And even when

the door was open she still paused trembling on the threshold, knowing that his eyes were upon her, yet at first not daring to raise hers to confront them.

"Olivia!" she heard him whisper.

She glanced up, and for an instant her look met that of those eyes whose light she remembered so well. He was too feeble to rise from his chair, but held out his arms towards her. The sight of that mute invitation was enough; with all hesitation cast aside, she flung herself on her knees before him, and was drawn passionately to his heart.

It was long before either spoke; there was no need of words even if words could have been found. At last Olivia felt the clasp which had held her so tightly partially relaxed, but it was not that she was to be yet liberated, only that she was to be more attentively contemplated than she had been hitherto. As she found how intently she was observed, she looked up with a smile half-bright, half-deprecating, and then discovered, somewhat to her relief, that they were alone in the room. Mrs. Waters had slipped out unperceived.

"And you are really mine again—really mine," he said, gazing into her face the while with a look of unspeakable tenderness, and smoothing the tangled hair away from her forehead, as though to convince himself by touch as well as by sight.

"If you will let me," she murmured, lowering her eyes again. "If you can only forgive me."

"Forgive you! you mean if you can forgive me. For I know how I wronged you, Olivia—I felt it at the time, and I have felt it more than ever since. With such disgrace on my name, to dare—I hate myself when I think of it."

"Harry! Harry! how can you speak so?"

"I speak what is true—I hate myself when I remember. But I loved you so, I could not give you up. And then I had promised never to say any thing to clear myself—I could not do that either. To clear myself I must have accused him, and I had given him my word that he was safe."

"I know, I know, dear Harry, and you were right to keep it. And I will help you to keep it still; helping you in every thing shall be my glory."

A strange shadow passed over his face.

"To keep it still! then does not every body—How did you find out?"

"Your sister told me; I had a right to be told, had I not? And I promised that I would always keep the secret until you gave me leave to tell it; I promised that to her, and now I promise it to you."

A sound like a groan escaped him as she spoke.

"You are the only one, then? I thought I was cleared before all the world. There, let it be," and here she felt his arm withdrawn from her waist. "Oh! why did you come back to me?"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Harry, dear Harry, what is the matter? You are sorry that this cloud still rests on you? Then it shall rest on you no longer. I will proclaim the truth to every one who has heard the lie."

"No!" he exclaimed, and caught her arm with sudden energy, as though to hold her back.

"I am free to do it if I like, remember. It was not your sister who told me so much as it was I who found out, and I warned her that I would not be silent unless you wished it. And if you do not wish it—"

"But I do, I do; I promised, and it must be. My poor Agnes—I could not—after all these years—"

"It would go very hardly with her, I know; and as for her husband, she says it would kill him, and very likely it would; and then poor Emmy— But still, for your sake—"

"For my sake; no. If you have ever cared for me, don't try to tempt me."

"You are quite resolved, then? Ah! I knew you would be. And I will not say but that you are right, Harry; you do not wish to make your sacrifice vain, and I think in your place I should not wish it either. And it shall not be made vain by me, dear; it is the business of my life to help and not to thwart you."

She crept nearer to him saying thus, and tried to lay her cheek against his hand. But he shrank away from her almost as though he feared her touch.

"No, leave me—I can not. Leave me, I say—now—or the parting will drive me mad."

"The parting? and why the parting? I thought we were never to part more."

"We must. I was weak once, but I will not be weak again. Yes, we must part; you shall not be dragged down by me."

She had half-looked for some such opposition on his part, so was not surprised, but only set herself with resolute love to overcome it.

"You must let me be the judge of that, Harry. And if what you call dragging me down I call raising me up, you will not refuse to raise me up, surely?"

He shook his head, and as she pressed closer to his side only made an effort to thrust her away.

"I am disgraced—disgraced before the eyes of all the world. I will not have you disgraced too."

"You are not disgraced, Harry, and if you were I should only be more determined to share unjust disgrace along with you. But you are not disgraced; your secret has been kept, and in the eyes of the world you are still Henry Graham, as you used to be."

"No, leave me; I will not be shaken. It is enough that I am not Henry Graham, enough that my real name is one I must be ashamed of. And besides, it is known who I am. How did you come to know yourself—that letter which you showed me—"

He paused with a shudder.

"Yes, he knows—my cousin Randal—but no one else, I am certain; he found out by his own cunning, for his own purposes, but for his own purposes he has chosen not to make his discovery public. And I shall find a way to make him choose so still."

"What! and do you think that even if only one man knows me to be Harold Maxwell, I would let you stoop to be Harold Maxwell's wife? What do you take me for?"

Again he tried to put her away from him, but she only clung the closer.

"If all the world knew instead of only one man, I would bear what the world might say."

me with pride and pleasure. But I will take care—not for my own sake, though; only for yours—I will take care that the world shall not know. Randal shall have Egerton Park—that would bribe him to greater things than keeping a secret for us; and we will go to India, or Australia, or an English village, or wherever you please, and be happy together all our lives long.”

She raised her glistening lashes to see the effect of her persuasion. His lips were quivering with such evident emotion that she hoped he was about to yield; but when he saw her looking he made a perceptible effort at self-composure, and presently answered, in a voice so cold and formal and constrained, that it scarcely seemed his voice at all:

“You are very good. I thank you very much for the sacrifice you would make—as much as if I were willing to accept it. But I am not so selfish as you think me.”

“Ah! Harry, how can you speak of sacrifice? Do you not know that the only sacrifice which it would cost me any thing to make would be of your love, of your approval—of you? Ah! to lose you would be like losing air and sunshine; but to give up all the parks and fine houses in the world— If only you will not reject me for being poor,” she added, smiling through her tears.

“Oh! if you were! if you only were!” He stretched out his arms for an instant, as though to fold them round her, but stopped himself, and waved her wildly away.

“What! you would drive me from you, you would send me out into the world by myself to be miserable when I might be the happiest of all creatures under the sun? You pretend that it is because you will not let me make a sacrifice, but that is not the reason; it is because you will not make a sacrifice—a sacrifice of your cold, cruel pride. Oh! Harry, and you say you are not selfish!”

She looked up yet again. This time his face was turned rigidly away, so that she could only see that it was perfectly pale and colorless.

“You will not even look at me? You are quite determined to cast me off, quite determined that I shall be lonely and miserable—and rich? Quite determined—yes, I see you are. Then, Harry, I will tell you something, and, remember, I am quite determined too. I will not be miserable and rich, at all events—I will not be mocked by my own money. Randal shall have Egerton Park in any case, and if you will not give me a home I will turn governess again. Well, you see how poor I shall be without you to help me—I will you not have pity?”

Still he did not turn his head.

“I see how it is, you do not believe me, but I never was more resolved in my life. Egerton Park has been a burden to me ever since I had it, and if I am to be turned away by you because I have the misfortune to possess it I shall abhor its very name. I will give it up, and if you choose to let me live poor and deserted and unhappy, why, so let it be. But I do not think you will be so unkind.”

She thought she saw him tremble, and, putting her hand on his timidly yet tenderly, she went on with caressing entreaty:

“Ah yes! Harry, you love me still a little—a very little, but too well to cast me out to be mis-

erable even though you try. When I want to reject me, you will not reject me, will you?”

He turned a momentary look on her smiling face, then with sudden passion fell on her neck, exclaiming:

“I can not! God forgive me, I have strength!”

He strained her to his heart, and for every thing was forgotten by those two each loved and was loved again. It was long before Olivia remembered at all; but, on lifting her eyes to her lover, a bitter expression which she saw there on her face that to his happiness, if not to her still existed a drawback.

“Oh the wrong I am doing you!” he murmured, as his glance caught hers, “that you have made me do you! How shall the shame of it?”

“A wrong! do you call it a wrong to cause to be so proud and happy? What mean by such a word?”

“But it is a wrong—a cruel wrong know it, though that only makes it the more so. That you should be the wife of a disgraced man and that I should suffer it!”

“How dare you, Harry? Disgraced only fault is that I must look up to you.”

“I know what I am—a disgraced man, oh! I never looked to feel my disgrace now; and yet I thought that I felt it too.”

“Ah! Harry, how little you must love me! Why, I feel all my sorrows light on you to share them.”

“If it was only sorrow! but it is shame you must share with me—shame. Alas! could I submit to have it fastened on me?”

“Do not repent your own generosity, Harry.”

“But I do repent—I cannot help it. I have the right to part with my own good as I have done. I thought at the time I was the only sufferer, but see how I was mistaken.”

“I am not a sufferer, Harry.”

“Oh! if I could have foreseen! But I did not know at first what I was doing—I thought I was only keeping another man’s secret. I was a fool, but I do not think I could have so liberally let myself be dishonored.”

“My own love, what need to excuse me to me?”

“And then, when I found what I had done it seemed so hard to come forward and say words that would ruin my poor sister’s family—and Austin who had once been so dear to me—after they thought themselves so well off. I could not do it.”

“I could not have done it either, I am sure. Dear Harry, all that you speak of is so done can not be undone—why not forget it?”

“Forget it! There are some things that can not be forgotten.”

“Ah! but for my sake this must be forgotten. You belong to me now, and you owe it to me to remember nothing except that. Oh! Harry, why do you look so? When I am so entirely happy, it is cruel of you not to be so entirely happy too.”

“Entirely happy!”

“Yes. Can you not be happy with me now, Harry?”

"Can I not? Ah! how can I help it?" he murmured, and drew her close and closer to himself.

When next she looked into his face she was almost satisfied. A trace of bitterness was indeed still visible—and she felt with a pang that nothing she might say could quite remove it—but it was mingled with such a look of rapturous tenderness as made her sure that regret for the past could not wholly mar what would otherwise have been the perfect happiness of the present, and with this assurance she was fain to rest content.

CHAPTER XL.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

MEANWHILE the time of Mrs. Waters's absence was passing very heavily and drearily at the Laurels, where Emmy and her father, though carefully avoiding all mention to each other of the real cause of their uneasiness, were almost equally low-spirited and out of sorts. It has been seen that Austin had been left by his wife in no enviable frame of mind, and, miserable and self-tormented as he was, Emmy was scarcely less so. She knew the nature of the business which took the two fellow-travellers to Southampton, Mrs. Waters having exchanged a few words with her during the hurried preparations for departure; and not only was it this additional proof of her mother's anxiety which grieved and depressed her, but the suspicion, now amounting in her mind to certainty, that for that anxiety she alone was responsible. As has been shown, she had been terribly afraid of this before, and now all further doubt was rendered impossible by a discovery which she had that day contrived to make.

"Did—did Miss Egerton—when you were with her just now—did she say nothing about how she had found out?" Emmy had ventured to inquire, while she was assisting her mother to put a few things together for her journey.

"Nothing. She did not tell me, and I never thought of asking."

"I think it must have been as I said before," Emmy rejoined, a good deal relieved by the answer. "He—Uncle Harold, you know—he must have confessed it himself; I always thought that must have been the way of it. Oh yes! of course he must; she never could have forgiven him, as you say she has, if she had found it out through any body else."

"You understand nothing about it," replied her mother, rather impatiently. "And she did find out through somebody else—I remember now—she spoke something about the person who had told her—some man it must have been, by what she said. But I will ask her another time."

Emmy said nothing more, but her heart sank within her as though it could never beat lightly again. So it was she who had worked the mischief, after all—she who had been the cause of her uncle's despair, perhaps his death—of her mother's sorrow and suspense. That man had betrayed her, there could be no doubt.

That day was the most wretched she had ever spent. She let her mother go without making any confession of her fault—how should she ever find courage to confess a fault so terrible? But the sense of forced isolation increased the bitter-

ness of her remorseful misery tenfold. She could do nothing but brood over her treason, and the steps by which she had been led to it—goi through all the circumstances of the time with minuteness of detail which cost her a very ago of shame. To think of the man despising her and laughing at her all the time he was leading her on—Ah! how she hated him! and yet, possible, she hated herself almost more for having been so degraded by him—degraded so that she could never know self-respect again. And think what she might have been if she had chosen—what indeed she had been only a little while ago—adored and idolized by John Thwaites, John Thwaites whom she now felt that she could lay down her life only to have tender look from. But she need never hope have a tender look from him again—never anything save coldness and contempt; he had made a mistake in her, and now he had found it out. Ah! how he must have despised her that night at the ball—that night when she had thought herself so triumphant; no wonder, indeed, he had sent back the ribbon. And if he could not guess the full measure of her baseness—why, would be ashamed of himself almost for ever having cared for her. Ah yes! it was all over now.

Thus, shut up in her own room, she pondered miserably till it was time to join her father at dinner. But when that time came, she did not find herself more cheerful in his company than she had been alone. There never was a meal, surely, more dreary than that dinner, with the white table formally laid out in centre dishes and side dishes (for not a jot of accustomed grandeur was abated), and Emmy and her father, great way off from one another, presiding in dismal dignity at the opposite ends, watched over by the two white-headed footmen, who hovered round with noiseless tread, ying with each other in decorous stolidity of countenance and apparent unconsciousness that any thing was wrong. There was little said by either father or daughter during dinner, and that little consisted of mere commonplace conventionalisms, spoken more to impose upon the footmen than for any thing else. But the footmen, with all their apparent unconsciousness, were not imposed upon a bit; and though perhaps imagining that financial causes had more to do with it than was really the case, were just as well aware of the despondency of their superiors as those superiors themselves.

It was not much of a relief even when the footmen went away and the pair were left alone at dessert. Neither was inclined for talking, and yet, now that they were by themselves, it seemed necessary to say something, and something so absolutely dry and artificial as the little remarks which had sufficed hitherto.

"How dull we seem to be without mamma!" began Emmy, after a few minutes of oppressive silence.

"Dull! yes, dull enough in all conscience," assented her father, pouring some brandy into his glass as he spoke, with so unsteady a hand that part of it overflowed. "But she doesn't care about that, so long— Did she tell you what she was going away for?"

"Something about Miss Egerton and Mr. Graham—to help her to look for him, was it not?" said Emmy nervously, for she was not aware

far her knowledge might be known or approved of by her father.

"Yes, that's just it—a most absurd thing, to be sure. An utter stranger—a man we know hardly any thing of, at least; and the idea of going to look for him—just because he has quarrelled with Miss Egerton and has chosen to take himself off. I think Miss Egerton might have taken the trouble for herself, without disturbing people who have nothing to do with him."

Emmy saw her father's solicitude that she should not suspect in what relation Mr. Graham really stood to them, and answered cautiously:

"Miss Egerton has always been so friendly with us—I suppose she thought that for her sake we shouldn't mind, and of course mamma's company must be a great comfort. I do hope they will find him; do you think they will, papa?"

"I don't know; I—that is, I think nothing about it." He drank off his brandy, and then went on with a more assured manner: "Except that I think them fools, to go wasting their time about a man who may be dead and buried weeks ago for what they can tell."

"Oh! papa!" said Emmy faintly. "But you don't really think he is, do you?"

"Well, if he isn't, why has he never written? to—any of his friends here, you know. And then his luggage at the inn—why did he never send for it? And if it is true he went to Southampton, as they seem to think—he would need his things all the more if he was going out of the country, wouldn't he? If he isn't dead, I don't see what can have become of him—that's all."

"Oh! surely, papa—" faltered Emmy. "There are so many other things that might have happened; surely it is not likely that—that—" and she stopped, her breath almost taken away by terror.

"What! and so you think they will find him, eh?"

"Oh yes! I do—indeed I do; I can not think any thing else."

"You and I differ, then," responded Austin sharply, and he poured out another glass of brandy, and tossed it down with as much energy as though he were drinking a toast.

"Oh! papa, it would be so dreadful!" said Emmy, half entreatingly.

"Dreadful! Oh yes! very dreadful of course.

But whatever happens it won't be my fault, so I don't see why I should make a fuss about it."

There was a kind of fierceness in his manner which almost shocked her, giving her as it did the idea that he felt not only indifference, but strong dislike, to the person whom he was speaking of, and who, as she could not help remembering, was his own brother-in-law. But presently she bethought herself what a burden and disgrace that brother-in-law had from the first been to him and his, and understood that his feelings under such circumstances might not be unnatural.

"He has brought it all on his own head," querulously went on Austin, perhaps conscious that his bitterness required some explanation. "Why did he come over to England, first of all? could he not have staid where he was well off? And what business had he to make up to Miss Egerton?—when he could not keep himself from quarrelling with her afterwards, I mean; he might have known how it would turn out. And because he has chosen to put his head into the lion's

mouth, I have got to suffer for it—all this worry, you know. I say it is very hard."

For an instant Emmy, thinking of all that she, no less than her father, was suffering by her uncle's means, could not help agreeing in her own mind that it really was rather hard. But then immediately afterwards she remembered the share which her own imprudence had contributed to the result, and her heart was wrung anew with remorse and self-reproach.

"Ah! but they will find him!" she cried in passionate sorrow; "I hope they will—I hope! Oh! if they did not, what—I should be so unhappy!"

"You are a fool!" said Austin angrily.

He refilled his glass once more, and swallowed the contents at a single draught. He was not accustomed to drink quite so deeply—not at least at that hour of the day—but his unwonted indulgence did not seem just now specially to affect him. His hand was tremulous and unsteady, but not more so than it had been when first he sat down to dinner; and instead of looking flushed and heated, as towards evening he not unfrequently did in these times, he was singularly wan and haggard, with no trace of color in his face save a faint red spot on either cheek. Emmy, already struck by the unusual harshness of his manner, was quite concerned as she observed him more particularly, and noticed how pale and suffering he appeared—so much concerned, that for a moment her anxiety for her uncle's safety was forgotten in a new solicitude.

"You are not fretting yourself about money, I hope, papa dear?" she asked timidly. "After what Mr. Podmore has said, it would be such nonsense to worry about it any more, you know."

"Nonsense? of course it would, ridiculous nonsense—do you think I don't know that just as well as you can tell me? Why, as for money, I never was in better spirits in my life. Podmore himself says I am all safe, and you may clap on two or three hundred per cent. to any thing that Podmore says. Oh yes! I shall be the richest man in the county yet, see if I shan't—if only I am let alone," he added, with a sudden gnashing of the teeth and clenching of the hands that quite frightened poor Emmy again.

"Oh, papa! But it is quite certain you are to be let alone, is it not? I thought Mr. Podmore had arranged that with the different people already."

"Oh! yes, yes, of course. And so you think they will find him, do you?"

Emmy hardly knew at first of whom he was speaking, but recollected herself in time to answer:

"What! Mr. Graham? Oh yes! I think so surely. It might be a little while first, but sooner or later—I can not doubt it."

"Can you not? Then I do."

Emmy was silent with astonishment. Could it be anxiety for his brother-in-law's fate which agitated her father so strangely? The topic was evidently very prominent in his mind, and even the fact of his taking so desponding a view in itself argued a more than ordinary interest. She felt the weight of her responsibility increased, if possible, still further.

"Will you come into the drawing-room, papa?" she said presently, by way of changing

the subject. "Tea will be ready by this time, I should think."

"I can not come to tea. I am going to be busy in the library."

"Busy again, papa! Why, you have been busy all day long. Wouldn't you like to come and have a little music?"

"No, no—no music to-night. I have something else to think of. Run away into the drawing-room by yourself, and don't worry me."

Emmy was not altogether sorry at the prospect of spending the evening alone; she felt that the effort of entertaining her father would have been almost too much for her under the circumstances. Still for his sake she made yet another endeavor to coax him into the drawing-room, but he would not come, and she had nothing for it but reluctantly to turn away.

"What will you bet that they find him?" Austin asked as she was leaving the room.

Emmy's heart was too full to let her answer. How sure her father seemed to be that there was no hope! And if there was no hope, how should she bear it?

That evening, for Emmy, as she sat in solitary grandeur in the drawing-room, was even more wretched than the day had been. She could make no attempt to distract her thoughts by books or work, could only sit and listen dismally to the wild gusts of wind that howled in the chimney, and the torrents of rain that every now and then rushed against the windows—brooding over her grief and her remorse. For the first time her mind was possessed by serious apprehension that her uncle might be really lost; with all her natural hopefulness, she could not help fearing the worst on finding that her father regarded it as so probable. And if it was so—if by her means her mother's brother had received his death-blow—ah! what should she do? how should she ever hold up her head again? And there would be none to comfort or sympathize, none to be her friend. Her father and mother would hate her and cast her off, and there was no one else now. There had been once—yes, one who would have taken her to his heart and cherished her though all the world had looked coldly on her; but she had been unworthy of him, and had lost him—lost him beyond all hope of recovery. Ah! the poor, lonely, deserted creature that she was and ever must be!

She sat up rather later than usual that evening, not because she was not sufficiently miserable where she was, but because the firelight and lamplight seemed after a fashion to keep her company, and she shrank from exchanging them for the dark solitude of her chamber. At last her watch told her that she had no pretext for further delay, and very unwillingly she took up her candle and prepared to retire for the night.

On leaving the drawing-room she paused a few seconds outside the library door. She was always accustomed to say good-night to her father before going to bed, and could not make an exception now, though, if there had been an excuse for doing so, she would gladly have availed herself of it. But there was none, so after a slight hesitation she tapped at the door. She was not wont to observe any such formality, but this evening she had a kind of instinct that her father might not like to be broken in upon without

warning. And yet she might have known that he was not then at his desk, for there was a regularly-recurring creak of footsteps from within which showed that somebody was pacing up and down the room.

"Come in," said her father's voice, and the sound of footsteps abruptly ceased.

She entered. He was standing in the middle of the room, with his face, still very pale, turned eagerly towards the door.

"Is that you at last? Why, I thought you were never going to bed. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing particular," stammered Emmy. "I was coming to say good-night now."

"Good-night! high time to say good-night, indeed. Why, it is nearly twelve."

"I shall soon be in bed now. I hope you are not going to be late yourself, papa. Have you finished your writing?"

She glanced at his desk. But it was close shut, and the table showed no signs of writing, finished or unfinished.

"My writing! Oh! of course—yes, very nearly. Have the servants gone to bed?"

"I don't know, really. Not without seeing first if we wanted any thing, I should think."

"Tell them we want nothing—tell them to go directly. Now mind you do; it is quite ridiculous they should sit up so late when there is no need."

"I will if you like, papa, but I don't suppose they care. Well, I will say good-night now."

"Good-night, child. No, stop one minute; I want to ask you—it has just occurred to me—did you ever see—somewhere among your mother's things—not that it matters much of course—a—an old desk—a—a writing-case it was, I think?"

"There is the desk mamma always uses, you know," said Emmy, looking puzzled.

"No, no, not that one. An old thing she keeps locked up somewhere—because she thinks it so shabby, I suppose—it can't be for any thing else. Come, you must have seen it, I'm sure."

"I don't think I have, papa, I don't really."

"Nonsense! you have; I am sure you have. Damn it, I tell you I know you have," he burst out angrily, as Emmy still shook her head. "At least I don't mean exactly that, of course, but I am sure, quite sure. Only think a little, and you will soon remember."

Emmy did think, and a ray of recollection presently dawned upon her.

"Oh yes! to be sure—I remember quite well. A brown leather writing-case—but it didn't look so very shabby either; I recollect asking mamma where she had bought it. Oh yes! I remember now—it was the day before we went to Nidbourne."

"And—and where is it? Where did you see it?"

"It was in mamma's chest of drawers—the old one in your bedroom; she was packing up her things for moving. But I don't know if you can get at it to-night, papa. Is there any thing in it you want?"

"Any thing I want—what do you mean?—the idea! Well, perhaps there might be a memorandum or two that it would be a convenience to see; that's what made me ask—but it is of

no great consequence. And why shouldn't I get at it to-night? is it put in another place, then?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. No, I rather think not—I heard mamma say only the other day she had done nothing to that chest since coming back. But the drawers are always locked, and I expect mamma has got the keys with her. It doesn't matter much, I hope, papa?"

"Of course not—of course—haven't I said so already? And so she has taken away her keys, has she?"

"I suppose so; at least I have not seen any thing of them. Unless she has left them about by accident, or in the pocket of her dress. But you can surely wait a day or two."

"Wait! oh yes! wait a whole year, if you like; it was only a matter of curiosity. There, good-night; you are quite late enough already."

He stooped down and kissed the rosy mouth which she held up to him. As he did so, she was struck by the peculiar parched dryness of his lips. She put out her hand to feel his—it was burning.

"I am afraid you are quite feverish, papa dear," she said, still keeping hold of his hand while she looked at him with a great deal of affectionate concern. "You are certain you are not worrying about money, eh?"

"No, no, nothing about money, I promise you—that will come right enough. Why, haven't I told you already that Podmore has warranted—You may make your mind easy about that, quite easy. Yes, and about every thing else—I will take care—for you as well as for myself—poor dear child—I will take care. Keep up your spirits; every thing will go well."

He spoke more tenderly than usual, and stroked her head very caressingly. She nestled gratefully to his side, exclaiming:

"My own dear papa! I am so glad to hear you say so! Oh yes! every thing will go well, I am certain—every thing."

"Trust me for that. Now run up stairs to bed, and don't hinder me any longer."

"What! are you not going to bed too, then? I thought you had done your work for to-night."

"Oh yes! so I have, of course—I am going almost directly. Don't forget to see about the servants—I hate to have them sitting up to all hours of the night like this. There, that will do—good-night!"

"Good-night, dear, dear papa," said Emmy, with a parting kiss, "and thank you for all the comfort you have given me. Oh yes! I will keep up my spirits. I have been rather out of sorts to-day with mamma being away, but things will look brighter in the morning, I am sure."

She left her father with these words, and was presently alone in her own room for the night. But in spite of her promise to keep up her spirits, she did not succeed in feeling much more cheerful than she had done all day, being indeed, if possible, more depressed since her last interview with her father even than before. What he had said was doubtless in matter very reassuring, but there had been something in his manner—something so feverish and flighty and altogether unaccountable—which, almost unconsciously to herself, more than counterbalanced the consolation she might otherwise have felt. She tried *very hard to hope for the best, but as she laid her head on the pillow that night she was still aware*

of a dark cloud of foreboding hanging over her, which, strive as she would, she could not shake off.

CHAPTER XLI.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

AUSTIN did not do any work down stairs after his daughter had left him, but neither did he go immediately to his bedroom as she had expected. For nearly half an hour he kept walking fretfully up and down in his library, biting his nails as though with ill-suppressed impatience, and every now and then stopping to look at his watch. At length, after returning it to his pocket for the tenth time at least, he wheeled round, and, instead of resuming his walk, went to the door and put out his head to listen.

All within the house was perfectly dark and still. The lights in the hall and staircase were all extinguished; and Austin, straining his ears for any slight sound of movement up stairs, heard nothing save the howling of the wind outside and an occasional rattle of the casements. Evidently the whole household was at rest.

He stepped back into the library, and took up his lamp. But it shook so in his hand that he laid it down again, and before going farther opened a cupboard in the wall where stood a bottle and glass. He filled the glass to the brim, and drank off its contents with avidity, then with steadier hand locked the cupboard, once more took up his lamp, and went softly out of the room.

Still softly he crept up stairs, and, reaching the door of his bedroom, noiselessly opened it. For a moment he glanced nervously round the spacious chamber, which, with its dark, distant corners, struck him as looking almost spectral in the dim lamp-light; then very gently he turned the key in the lock.

He did not fasten his door usually, but this time he was so particular to do so that he even took the trouble of looking to see if the key had really turned. There was another door communicating with his dressing-room, which he locked also, with the same precaution as the other; and then, looking once more round the room to make quite sure that he was alone, he drew a long breath of relief. It was satisfactory to feel that he was alone, and might remain alone during his own pleasure—free from the possibility of interference from the outer world. Nobody could interfere now except by his permission—unless indeed they broke open the door to get at him; and they would hardly dare to go so far as that, he thought to himself, and half smiled at the absurdity of his own fancies.

He advanced to a table in the middle of the room, and set down the lamp with a slight shiver.

He did not know how it was, but the room, which had always before seemed to him particularly comfortable and cheerful, did not look like itself this evening. Whether it was the sense of unaccustomed loneliness, or the angry gusts of wind which every now and then shook the window frames and even stirred the long folds of the closely-drawn curtains—what was the cause he could not have said, but somehow he felt almost afraid of looking about him. It would not do, however, to yield to such feelings, and with some-

thing of an effort he turned his head towards the corner where, as he knew, stood the old mahogany chest of drawers that had accompanied the family from their first home.

As he glanced at the familiar piece of furniture—the only piece of furniture in the room with which he had associations more than a few months old, and the aspect of which had hitherto seemed almost friendly to him in consequence—as he saw it now, it was with a strange shrinking feeling such as that with which one may look on a coffin or other object connected in the mind with half-ghastly, half-loathsome uses. Ah! if he had only known from the first what that chest contained, if he could have guessed what lay concealed from view behind that smooth polished front— But never mind; he knew now, and better late than never.

He went forward, trembling in every limb, and, kneeling down, tried each drawer in succession. But in vain; all the drawers were locked, and no amount of mere pulling or shaking could get them open. He rose and set himself to search the room for the keys.

He fumbled among his wife's things lying in different parts of the room—the combs and brushes and gloves and pins left out on the toilet-table, the veil and scarf tossed on the sofa, the morning-dress hanging on the door—all the mute evidences of her recent presence and hurried departure. He would rather not have touched them if he could have avoided it; every thing that was hers seemed so strangely imbued with her personality that he felt as though her eyes were following him all the time, and reproaching him for his purpose. But his purpose was too firmly fixed to be moved, and he went on with dogged defiance, shaking out shawls and handkerchiefs, and feeling pockets, and lifting knick-knacks—searching, indeed, thoroughly in every corner.

But with all his searching he could not find what he wanted.

Again he knelt down by the chest, and, taking out his own keys, tried one after another on the lock of each drawer. But although he found two or three that passed readily enough into the key-hole, there was not one that by his utmost force he could get to turn the lock; and after several minutes spent in fruitless labor he rose, wiping from his forehead the drops of cold perspiration that had gathered there. How that wretched wooden thing seemed endowed with stolid will to baffle him! But he would conquer—yes, he would conquer, if the shining mahogany had to be splintered first into match-wood.

He was unaccountably tremulous and out of breath with his exertions, and sat down to rest a little before renewing the attack.

What a great dismal vault the room looked, with only that little reading-lamp to light it! and then those long dark curtains swinging to and fro in the wind! How strong that wind was, to be sure—it made the very lamp flicker sometimes; and the howling—he had never heard wind howl so before; one would think human voices were crying and wailing and sobbing round the house. People long ago would have said that ghosts and witches were at work; and no wonder—if he believed in ghosts and witches he would say so himself. It was just the kind of night for evil things to come out of their hiding-

places and evil deeds to be done—a kind of night on which one might fancy a murder being committed.

A murder! he quite started at the idea. He had sometimes wondered how people felt when they were committing a murder, but he thought he understood now.

And yet why should he feel so? How foolish and inconsistent it was! He was doing no wrong, only looking for an old letter—a letter he had written himself, too, and was morally entitled to recover and destroy if he pleased. His wife had said it would be like treason to destroy it, but that was nonsense. Treason, forsooth—just because that man would be deprived of the means of exalting himself, and ruining every body else! And why should he not be deprived—why? What had he done that he was to be suffered to hold a knife to other people's throats through all eternity? He had done something, it was not to be denied, but nothing so prodigiously grand or self-sacrificing, after all. Any one not an absolute monster would have done the same for a sister and a sister's husband who had been so kind to him, and it was for the sister a great deal more than for the husband. And whatever he had done he had been abundantly thanked for—thanked at the time, and during years upon years during which he had been spoken of, and thought of, and prayed for, and looked up to as a kind of superior being.

The bondage and oppression and slavery of all those years!

Austin's whole spirit rose up in rebellion as he thought of how much the acceptance of that single obligation had cost him, tracing in his memory the entire course of his mental history ever since. What a perpetual phrasing about gratitude he had had to keep up, not to his wife merely, but to himself in the depth of his own consciousness! He had felt something just at first, probably, of what he had said, for he could remember that for a year or two after it happened he used to think how he should like to see the man, and thank him with his own lips. How incomprehensible it seemed now! But that desire must have soon worn off, for, a year or two after that again, there had been something said in one of the periodical letters from India about never coming home, and he remembered that he had not been sorry. And then gradually, by slow degrees which he could not now exactly follow, he began to have disagreeable associations with those letters and every thing that reminded him of the writer, and preferred to forget, when he could, that any such person existed. Not that he had ever admitted such feelings even in his own mind—no, he had tried to be grateful to the very last, tried to the very last to humble himself at that other one's feet, and make him out a friend and benefactor and hero; he was actually ashamed to think how he had tried.

And yet there was a kind of satisfaction too in remembering; if he had gone through so much then, he was the more entitled to regard the debt as wiped out now. Yes indeed, it was wiped out—whatever debt there had been—wiped out ten million times. He was free—free to hate the fellow if he liked—aye, and he would hate him—he hated him already, hated him so that if a wish could strike him dead that wish should be uttered.

Perhaps he was dead already.

As this thought passed through Austin's mind the room suddenly grew more dreary and spectral than ever—so much so that for some seconds he absolutely dared not look round. What if the person he had been thinking of were indeed dead, and what if the dead had the power of returning to spy the thoughts and actions of the living? What if he were not alone in that room as he had believed, but watched from some dark corner by the angry eyes of his dead enemy—the enemy whose memory he was about to rob of the last chance of vindication? How stern those eyes would look if they were really there! how they would seek to frown him down and scare him from his purpose! But he would not be scared from it; he was alive, and, being alive, could surely have his own way against any number of dead men. Still, it was a dreadful thing to think of those eyes watching him.

He forced a smile; the idea was so horrible that he was obliged to take refuge in unbelief. No, the fellow was not dead; it was absurd to suppose it—if it had been so, the news would have come long ago. He was living still—living, and perhaps at that very instant plotting to return and ruin every body he had a grudge against—calculating, very likely, how he would bring forward that letter—What! and there the letter still lay waiting for him, and who knew but that he was already on his way? Ah! fool to sit there idly while the precious minutes slipped by! And with a muttered curse against his own tardiness Austin staggered to his feet once more.

This time he felt it necessary to bring some instrument to the assault, and, after looking round vainly for something more suitable, he clutched desperately at the poker. As he did so, he remembered with a kind of shudder something he had read about somebody having dashed out a man's brains with a poker the other day; but he did not put the thing down for that, only grasped it the tighter. To get at that letter he was ready to dash out a man's brains if it were needful; yes, even though the man were Harold Maxwell.

He struck the first blow with his new weapon—a heavy, well-planted blow just under the key-hole of the middle drawer. But no sooner had he struck than he paused in consternation at the noise he had himself made. What had he been thinking of? If he went on, the whole household would be alarmed. He listened a few minutes, hardly daring to move, and then, hearing nothing but the wailing of the wind without, laid down the poker softly on the carpet, and set himself to consider a more silent mode of achieving his purpose. For as yet he had made no progress towards his end; there was a dimple under the key-hole of the middle drawer, but that was all.

Soon a new idea occurred to him.

He crossed the room towards a small cabinet which stood at the farther end of it, and in which he kept all his most important deeds and papers. This he unlocked, and after a minute's search drew forth a large bunch of keys of all shapes and sizes and varieties of workmanship, or rather a collection of such bunches, being indeed the whole of Uncle Gilbert's stock, and Uncle Gilbert had locked up every thing.

Thus armed, he knelt down by the mahogany chest yet again, and, choosing the most likely-

looking keys of the set, began to experiment with them on the lock of that obstinate middle drawer. The first was a failure—so was the second—so was the third; but the fourth—when he tried to turn it, there was a click as though it nearly fitted into the wards, but not quite; he tried again with greater force and it went round.

The drawer was unlocked.

With hands that trembled so that he could hardly control their movements, he pulled it open and began to search. A sheet of tissue-paper lay on the top (what an intolerable rustle it made as he tossed it off!), and then came a quantity of children's clothes—a little worn cloth pelisse, and a boy's cap, and a tiny white embroidered robe, and other such articles, which he huddled aside almost wrathfully while he thrust his hands down to the bottom. He felt something hard and square lying there, and drew it eagerly out, but it was not what he expected—only a great book, with gay paper covers much the worse for wear, and a written label pasted outside with the inscription—"Austy's Scrap-book. From dear Papa and Mamma."

The sight made him pause an instant in the very hottest of his search.

How well he remembered writing that label, to be sure—it was in his old office-days at Liverpool, one evening when he had come home from business; and he had been at such pains in devising flourishes and painting up the strokes! So that was the drawer where his wife kept the things belonging to their dead children—he understood all about the little pelisse and cap now. Poor children—poor dear children—well, he would meet them all again some day—they were looking down upon him now, perhaps. Ah! what could they think of him for what he was doing? Still he must go on; for their sakes as well as his own he must go on. They would not wish their father to be disgraced.

He put the things back into the drawer—a great deal more tenderly than he had taken them out, even examining one or two of them with reverent curiosity. As he came to the little white embroidered robe again, he noticed that it was marked with the initials H. W.—so it had been the baby's; the baby had been christened Harold, had been called Harry sometimes, like—like that other. Poor baby—perhaps it was almost as well—He could not have borne to have that name perpetually shouted about the house.

He covered up the robe very quickly, and, shutting the drawer rather in a hurry, proceeded to try the same key on the one below. After a little difficulty he got it open, as he had done the first, and, with hands that shook, if possible, more than ever, tore off the sheet of paper spread over its contents.

The first thing he saw was a woman's dress of white muslin, or rather muslin that had once been white, for it was soiled and crushed now as though by years of hoarding. He thought at first it was some old dress of Emmy's, and was tumbling it up very disrespectfully, when his finger caught in a bunch of artificial flowers which in another instant he saw to be a spray of orange-blossom. He understood now—it was her wedding-dress which his wife garnered up so carefully; those very flowers in which his finger had caught had risen and fallen on her bosom that

morning when she stood by his side in church murmuring the responses.

Ah! how beautiful she had looked—he remembered, as though it were yesterday—and how proud he had felt, and how determined to make her happy! But he did not know then how that boy-brother at her side was to grow up and spoil every thing—that boy who had stood so close to her, looking as pleased and holding up his head as high as if he had been a king's son instead of a poor beggar whose very schooling had to be paid for. No, truly he did not know then; if he had, surely he could not have kept himself from committing murder on the spot.

He lifted out the dress as carefully as he could and laid it on one side, then turned to the drawer again and saw—a brown-leather writing-case.

His breath came short and thick; for a few moments he could do nothing for sheer want of air. When he was a little recovered he seized on the writing-case with both hands, and, lifting it with some difficulty (for he still felt faint and giddy), staggered to the table and set it down.

He looked round the room, half-fearful that somebody might appear to dispute his right. Nobody was there, but as he looked he was for the first time struck by a strange resemblance between that room and the one in which he had waited to see Uncle Gilbert die, and an eerie shiver crept over him almost as though he felt himself once more in an atmosphere of death. And yet the shape of the two rooms was entirely different, and so was the furniture—he could not account for the fancy. And then there was no monotonously-ticking clock to vex him here—nothing but the storm outside and the fluttering beat of his own heart.

He roused himself; there was more for him to do, and he must do it.

The case was locked, but he did not think much of such obstacles now. After vainly trying one or two keys, he found that this lock was of more complicated construction than the others had been; so he set to work in a slightly different method, taking out his penknife and sawing through the leathern flap to which the lock was attached. He was very full of ridiculous fancies, certainly, for as he slowly made his way through the resisting substance he found himself wondering if the sensation was any thing like that of cutting a man's throat.

In a minute more the case was open, and the contents—a loose mass of letters and manuscripts—were exposed to view.

He plunged his hand eagerly among them, taking up one paper after another, and holding it close to his eyes almost as though he had been near-sighted—not that he was really so, but just now there was a thick film before all he saw which made it difficult for him to discern any thing.

Presently a stifled murmur escaped him, and his fingers closed with feverish tenacity round a letter the superscription of which he was thus examining. He had recognized his own writing on the envelope, and he knew that at last he had found that which he sought.

He clutched at the table for support, and let himself drop into a chair that stood by, unable to keep his feet longer for a sharp cutting pain in his side which *seemed to vibrate thence through*

his whole frame. But he held the letter as tightly as ever, and, mingled with the pain, felt a thrill of exultation as at some great victory. So he had got it into his possession at last—the only existing evidence of his shame—had got it into his possession to do with it as he would! Ah! the delight there would be in seeing the burning paper curl and frizzle and writhe, and then fall down in crisp black ash, to be crushed and stamped out of existence under the sole of his foot!

He drew the lamp nearer and turned up the wick a little higher, then, watching the flame with almost epicurean zest, daintily took the letter out of the envelope and unfolded it.

Stop! it might be as well, perhaps, just to glance over the thing first, to make quite sure that he had really got what he wanted. He held the paper up to his eyes—he had to look at things more closely than ever now—and made out a few words at sight of which his heart gave a great throb of recognition that for a moment took the pain at his side away.

Yes, that was it, sure enough; how well he remembered writing it—that night—after every body was asleep—sitting in the little back bedroom of the old house—with his wife lying in the next room, and poor Austy in a crib by her bedside; the doctor had been to see them that evening, and said he could not answer for either of them. If it were not for the wind he could almost fancy the time come back again, and there had been a little wind that night too; the sashes had rattled once and made him let a great spot of ink fall on the table; had that spot ever been washed out, he wondered? But the table stood in quite a different place to-night, and it was not the same table either—no, every thing was different. Besides, nobody was in the next room now; or was she there still—could it be? why then Austy must be there too—Austy was living yet—all the children—So it had been only a dream, after all—only a dream, and every thing was right again; why, had not Harry just come home with the scholarship? Hark, what was that?—not the wind—a voice—Uncle Gilbert's voice. What! does he want to come in? no, no, don't let him—don't! If it had not been for Uncle Gilbert—Keep him out—keep him out; he shall not—Help, help! Agnes!

The last words were uttered aloud—uttered in a voice so shrill and piercing that the very walls seemed to ring with it.

But no one heard and no one answered.

CHAPTER XLII.

DAYLIGHT LET IN.

EMMY's sleep that night had been very disturbed and restless for the first two or three hours, and she did not awake next morning till it was already quite light—as light, at least, as was compatible with a bleak, cheerless sky, still overspread with heavy leaden-looking clouds which the night's storm had failed to disperse. They were accustomed to keep rather early hours at the Laurels, Austin's frequent journeys to Beacon Bay making it necessary for him to turn the short winter days to the best account; so, immediately on discovering how late it was, EMMY rose and set about her toilet, hurrying as much as

she could in order to be in time to preside at her father's breakfast. But she need not have troubled herself to make such haste, for when she descended to the breakfast-room her father was not yet there.

The urn was brought, and Emmy made the tea and coffee very expeditiously, still rather afraid that he would appear before things were quite ready for him. But he did not; he did not appear even by the time his coffee was prepared and poured out, and after a few minutes more she thought she would go up stairs and tell him that breakfast was waiting.

But instead of being on the point of coming down, as she had expected, he was evidently not even yet awake, for when she knocked at his door no answer was returned. She was just going to knock again when she remembered how tired and harassed he had looked the night before, and decided that it would be best to let him have all the rest possible. So she turned away from the door, stealing along on tip-toe lest she should have already disturbed him, and slipped softly down stairs again.

She went back to the breakfast-room, and sat down to her solitary meal, feeling it incumbent on her, as a matter of usage, to go through the form of taking something. But she had no appetite whatever, and did little else than sit disconsolately, looking at her father and mother's empty places, and breaking infinitesimal pieces of toast into her tea.

For she did not feel nearly so reassured this morning as she had predicted. On the contrary, what with the gray sunless weather and the unaccustomed solitude of the breakfast-room, she found every thing looking strangely dull and dreary, and could not keep herself from speculating dismally on the very worst that might happen as a consequence of her folly and treachery. Her poor dear mother! that was the idea in which all her anxieties centred.

As she was sitting thus dolefully by herself, making hardly any progress with her meal, the door opened, and she looked up half-expecting to see her father. But it was not her father, only a servant, who came in to say:

"Master is not down yet, I think, is he, miss? Because Mr. Podmore has just called, and wants to speak to him very particular on business. I told him master had not left his room yet, but he said he would step in and wait—he is in the library now. Would it be disturbing master if I was to go and tell him?"

"He was so late last night," said Emmy hesitatingly, "it seems almost a pity. Show Mr. Podmore in here; I will go to papa myself if it is of any consequence."

The man withdrew, and immediately afterwards the lawyer was ushered in.

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, how do you do?" said Emmy, rising to receive the little man with a good deal of cordiality, for it was quite a relief to her to have her solitude broken in upon. "I am breakfasting all alone, you see. Pray sit down; and may I give you a cup of tea?"

But Mr. Podmore accepted neither of these civilities.

"Thank you, I have had breakfast," he answered gravely, so gravely that Emmy might have felt a little surprised if she had been in the mood for noticing such details. "Mr. Waters

is not down yet, they tell me?" he added with a glance round the room.

"Not yet; indeed I fancy he is still asleep—at least he was a few minutes ago, and he was so late in going to bed last night that I did not like to disturb him. But of course if it is any thing very particular— Shall I go and tell him you are here?"

"Well, if you would be so kind, Miss Waters," said the lawyer, coughing gently behind his hand. "I have a business communication to make to him which perhaps it is better not to delay; in fact, it was my desire that there should be no delay which has made me intrude on you at this early hour. So if it is not giving you too much trouble—" and he coughed again.

If the speaker had been any other than Mr. Podmore, Emmy must certainly this time have been struck by the extra gravity of his demeanor—gravity which a slight shade of accompanying embarrassment only brought into additional relief. But then Mr. Podmore was always a little more solemn than other people, and, as has been seen, Emmy was not in an observant humor this morning.

"Is there any message I can take up?" she asked before leaving the room.

"Message? Oh no! I think it will be better that I myself— You might just mention to Mr. Waters that a circumstance has arisen with which it is necessary to make him acquainted, but that is all just now."

And then with another cough Mr. Podmore sat down to wait, and Emmy ran up stairs on her errand.

"Papa!" she said, knocking gently at her father's door, for she was afraid of rousing him too abruptly.

He did not answer, and she knocked again, a little louder than before.

"Papa dear, Mr. Podmore has just called."

Again there was no answer. She waited a second or two, and then softly turned the handle; she would go in and wake him with a kiss. But this was not to be done either, for the door was locked.

She tapped on the panels quite smartly.

"Papa, it is time to get up; Mr. Podmore is waiting for you—papa!"

Still no reply came. How sound asleep he was, to be sure! she had never known him sleep so heavily before. And how tiresome that he had locked the door!

Perhaps she might get in through the dressing-room. Yes, the dressing-room door was unlocked, sure enough, and she went round to the other door communicating with the bedroom. But when she tried it, she found this one fastened also.

"Papa!" she repeated, tapping rather more softly than the last time, for she remembered that this door was almost close to the head of the bed, "are you not going to get up this morning? It is past ten o'clock, and Mr. Podmore— Papa! papa!" and, suddenly losing all compunction about startling him, she knocked as loudly as she was able. But still no sound from within.

A terrible fear seized her—fear of what, she could not have said, but such fear as caused her heart in one instant to double its pulsations, and made her limbs nearly give way under her. She beat at the door with all her strength, shaking

and rattling it, and crying "Papa! papa!" as though she had all at once gone frantic. But no one answered, and, with a thrill of terror such as she had never felt in her life before, she rushed from the door and flew half-way down stairs, calling out wildly: "Mr. Podmore!"

The appeal was so loud that Mr. Podmore heard immediately, and came into the hall looking very much startled.

"What is the matter?"

The question seemed somehow to bring Emmy back to her senses. The necessity of explaining her fears to another person made them look so ridiculous that she felt almost ashamed of them. What could Mr. Podmore think of her for being so silly?

"It is very foolish of me—I beg your pardon, I'm sure. But—but I can not make papa hear—he is sleeping so soundly, I suppose; and I don't know why, but for a moment I got almost afraid—Oh! don't trouble to come up."

But Mr. Podmore, taking no notice of these last words, began to come up instantly. There was another rush of fear through Emmy's heart. Was he afraid too, then?

"It was so very foolish of me," she said, forcing a smile as she turned back on her way up stairs again, with the lawyer close behind—"I am really quite ashamed. The very idea of being frightened about such a thing, you know! Papa dear, here is Mr. Podmore." And again she tapped at the bedroom door. But still there was no answer, no answer even when the summons was supplemented by a smart rap from the lawyer's cane.

"Is he a heavy sleeper usually?" inquired Mr. Podmore thoughtfully.

"Not usually," said Emmy, trembling very much; "no, he sleeps rather lightly, in a general way, but he went to bed so late last night, you see. It is really very awkward to know what to do, is it not?" and again she forced a little smile.

Mr. Podmore, however, seemed to feel the annoyance of the dilemma more than its absurdity, for he did not relax a muscle of his face, only smote upon the door again, harder than before. But all within continued silent.

"Was there any thing—any thing peculiar about him last night?" the lawyer asked, after a brief pause. "Did he seem at all in low spirits?"

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, what do you mean?" said Emmy, trembling more than ever; and then, as she remembered how strange and flighty her father's manner had been, she grew cold with vague apprehension. "He was a little nervous and out of sorts, perhaps, but what with one thing and another—and mamma being away too—that is enough to make us feel dull, of course."

"He can not have heard the news, surely?"

"The news! what news?" cried Emmy almost with a shriek. "Oh! is it any thing about mamma—any thing about—"

"No, no, nothing about your mamma, don't be frightened for that. It is about this Beacon Bay branch—the shareholders held a meeting yesterday, and vetoed the project over the heads of the Directors; the land is not worth the amount it is mortgaged for. But he can not have heard any thing about it yet, I should think, has he?"

Emmy stood almost paralyzed with consternation. Nor was it the prospect of poverty that

dismayed her so, though she knew enough of her father's affairs to understand that the failure of the scheme for the Beacon Bay railway meant ruin utter and hopeless. But, crushing as such a reverse would have been to her under ordinary circumstances, she hardly felt it now; she thought of the news only in connection with her father, and in the light of that terrible question of the lawyer's as to his spirits on the previous evening—a question which seemed to open up a very abyss of dread possibilities. Oh! could it be that— But no; the more she reflected, the more she was convinced that, whatever causes of anxiety and harassment might have weighed on her father's mind last night, the knowledge of this new and final calamity was not among them; had he not expressly said that as regarded money matters every thing was going well?

"I am sure he has not heard—quite sure. Oh! how can you frighten me so! I tell you he sat up very late last night, so no wonder—Papa! papa! papa!"

She knocked at the door again with frenzied impatience. But the result was still the same.

"We must have it broken open," declared Mr. Podmore.

"Broken open!" cried Emmy. "Oh! surely—" She paused, half choking. Had it actually come to breaking open the door? And yet, extreme as the measure seemed, she could not say that it was unnecessary.

"He may have been taken with some slight illness, you know," said Mr. Podmore soothingly. "If you will wait a moment I will go and call the servants. Don't be afraid; I dare say it is nothing of consequence."

He ran down stairs quickly. Emmy leaned against the rail of the landing and waited; she could not have moved or even stood upright without support. Oh! what did it all mean? or was it only a dream?

"Here! bring a chisel or hammer or something," she heard Mr. Podmore's voice say. "Make haste—there is something wrong up stairs—make haste!"

Emmy quivered in every limb. Something wrong! how undoubtedly he said it—something wrong! And he had just told her not to be frightened.

There was a confused noise from below as of many footsteps, and then Mr. Podmore spoke again:

"Stop! run for the doctor, one of you—Dr. Plummer. He is close by, that's one good thing; his carriage was standing at Mr. Brown's as I came along. Run—tell him to come directly."

The doctor! Emmy grew faint and dizzy as she heard. What was the doctor to do? But to be sure, if it really was a case of slight illness—

The footsteps began to ascend the stairs. Emmy looked, and saw first Mr. Podmore coming up and one of the men-servants following with a hammer and chisel, and next the cook drying her hands hastily on her apron, and then the two housemaids, and the lady's-maid, and the kitchen-maid—the whole household down to the very knife-boy—all trooping up to see and hear. What did they mean by it? They thought, then, that something very serious was the matter?

"Had you not better go down stairs, Miss Waters?" said Mr. Podmore as he came up, and

he spoke more kindly than she had ever heard him. But she answered "No," almost rudely.

They all came crowding on to the landing. Emmy had been standing a little way from the bedroom door, and found herself almost shut out from a view of it by so many pressing round. But she did not make her way to the front again, for the simple reason that for the time all strength and energy seemed to have deserted her; so she remained in the background, leaning against the rail and listening.

"You had better drive it in there—just above the lock," she heard Mr. Podmore say.

"Just here, sir?"

"Yes."

And then came a heavy crashing blow, the sound of which made Emmy's blood tingle down to the very finger-tips, while almost in the same instant she looked up with a wild flash of hope and eager expectation. Surely, surely he must hear this.

But no, all was silent in the room, and presently the blow was repeated, and Emmy quailed as though it had been dealt upon herself. Still no sign of movement within.

For some minutes this went on—one blow after another (sharp ringing blows that seemed to vibrate though the staircase and the whole house)—the cracking and creaking of resisting timber—the clash and clang of metal; and in the intervals dead silence. What with that noise and that silence, Emmy felt as though she must go mad.

"Isn't it beginning to give a little now?" said Mr. Podmore at last, and the sound of his voice came almost as a relief.

"Just a little, sir, but it's wonderful firm. If we could but set to work in two places at once, that would do it directly, I think."

"Go and get another chisel, then, or an axe, or something. We must have it open somehow."

"I'll go and see what there is, sir. The wood-chopper, perhaps."

Somebody went down stairs and there was a momentary silence—how grim and death-like that silence was! But hardly had the echo of the descending footsteps ceased when other footsteps were heard mounting—heavy, slow-treading footsteps that sounded like those of a person in authority. Emmy looked, and saw a large stout figure coming up stairs, which she immediately recognized as that of Dr. Plummer.

"Dear me! dear me! this is very bad," said the doctor lugubriously, as, wheezing somewhat, he reached the level of the landing. "And you have not got the door open yet, I see."

"No, not yet. I am so glad you have come," said Mr. Podmore warmly; and nevertheless Mr. Podmore was not a man wont to find any amount of responsibility too much for him.

"Oh! of course I made all the haste I could when I heard—And this has been quite sudden, has it? He did not seem at all poorly yesterday?"

The question was not addressed to Emmy, who, standing behind every body else, was out of the way of observation. But Emmy heard, and felt an icy chill in all her veins. What did the man speak of as "this?"

"Not as I know of," said the cook, dropping a courtesy—"leastways not to be laid up. But *he has been looking dreadful pale and gashly-like two or three days back, and it was only last*

night I see a winding-sheet in the candle, and thought to myself—"

"Pooh, pooh, that's neither here nor there. Did any thing special occur in the course of yesterday to excite him, Podmore, do you know?"

"I can't say about any thing special, but of course the general state— Well, is that the chopper? Bring it here."

"I think we shall do it now, sir."

"Lay it underneath—so, and then give a wrench as I drive in the chisel. Now!"

A loud shivering crash—louder than any thing that had gone before. Emmy felt herself growing absolutely rigid with the extremity of her suspense, and she fixed her eyes on the upper panels of the door—it was all she could see of it for the intervening press of by-standers—with a gaze that was almost vacant.

"It is coming now, sir. Once more, please."

Another crash, louder still this time—a sound of creaking hinges; and then, instead of the panels there was a dark space, faintly illumined by a dim ray of lamp-light. Emmy had a singular sensation of dreamy surprise. Why should it be night in there when it was daylight everywhere else?

There was a general move in front of her; every body was going forward into the room. Emmy followed automatically; her past terrors had half stupefied her, and as she passed into that strangely-lighted chamber, where the yellow glow of the lamp mingled spectrally with a gray glimmer of daylight that struggled in between the closed curtains, every thing looked so unreal that she scarcely knew whether she was in the waking-world at all.

Suddenly she caught sight of a figure sitting at a table in the middle of the room, and felt a thrill of indescribable relief. Why, so there was her father, after all!

Probably she uttered some slight cry or exclamation, for somebody just then looked round—it was one of the housemaids—and, instantly getting between her and the table, took her by the arm and attempted to turn her back.

"No, miss dear, no—better not. Come down stairs with me—I'll take care of you. Come, miss dear."

But Emmy extricated herself angrily, and, pushing past the speaker, made a step forward which brought her once more in view of the table. There sat her father, his face propped on one hand, a letter in the other, his eyes turned towards her—

Why did she not go up to him?

Why? Ah! because she saw that those eyes which stared at her so fixedly were the glazed eyes of a dead man.

She had never looked on death before, and yet, seeing it now, she recognized it at once. She stood still for an instant, then tottered, and, losing her balance, dropped into the ready arms of the good-natured housemaid. But, giddy and half-fainting though she was, she had still strength left to resist all the girl's kindly efforts to lead her from the room.

Meanwhile Mr. Podmore and the doctor, too much engrossed to take notice of Emmy's presence in that dimly-lighted room, or indeed to remember her existence at all, had gone up to the table, and stood contemplating the rigid form that sat there so grimly and immovably.

"Quite cold, I suppose?" said Mr. Podmore presently, in a low voice—so low as to be almost a whisper.

"Oh! quite," returned the doctor, and his voice was as subdued as the other's had been. "It must have been several hours ago."

"And—how do you think it was?" asked Mr. Podmore again, and he looked round with a glance that was almost timid. "The room seems in great confusion."

"Oh! but I believe it has been quite natural. I have seen for a long time back that there was something wrong with the heart; I am not at all surprised."

"I don't see any thing like a glass or vial, certainly," said Mr. Podmore, with another nervous glance round; "but still it is so strange—That letter—it seems as if he had been writing something to leave behind him. We had better look, had we not?"

"I think we had," said the doctor. "Will you do it, then?"

"Very well, as you wish it. The evidence may be very important."

With something of a shudder Mr. Podmore put out his hand and took hold of a corner of the letter that drooped down from the dead man's fingers. The tenacity with which those fingers had closed round it must have relaxed somewhat just before the last, for they offered hardly any resistance to the attempted withdrawal of the paper, and the lawyer found himself almost at once in possession of what he wanted.

Just then some one drew back the window curtains, and a flood of chill gray light was let in upon the scene, overpowering the rays of the lamp, and instantly bringing into cold, hard, bare relief the ghastly outlines which they had softened. The effect was inexpressibly dreary.

"Let me see," muttered Mr. Podmore, drawing near the window. "'My dear Harry'—who can that be, I wonder?—'if you will do me the favor'—'cashing the inclosed draft'—Why, what's this about? And the date is nineteen years ago.'"

"Here is the envelope, sir, I think," said one of the servants, and picked something up from the floor as he spoke.

"Give it here. 'Harold Maxwell, Esq.' Harold Maxwell—why, that was— And then the date—yes, every thing shows— Why, what do you think—that forgery—he did it himself, after all!"

"I can hardly think so," said the doctor, who was still standing by the table. "The more I look, the more I should judge it to have been quite natural."

"No, no, I don't mean that. No, that forgery—don't you remember?—what that young fellow Maxwell got into trouble about—old Mr. Waters made sure he was the one, and so did I. Well, now it seems that all the time—"

He stopped, interrupted by a feeble cry from the other end of the room. He looked round; there was a commotion among the women servants, and somewhat to his consternation he saw that they had gathered round the drooping figure of Emmy, who lay apparently senseless in the arms of one of them.

"How! Miss Waters here! What do you mean by allowing— What is the matter, Plummer? has she fainted?"

But Emmy had not fainted; it would have been almost better for her if she had. Her bodily powers had given way, but in the midst of their collapse she had consciousness enough to retain distinct recollection of the lawyer's words, and to comprehend the terrible charge against her father which they embodied; yes, and not only to comprehend, but to believe. Like lightning there flashed through her mind the memory of a thousand little circumstances—some that had passed almost unnoticed at the time, some that had surprised and perplexed her as altogether unintelligible—which now, in the sudden light thus cast on them, arranged themselves at once as parts of a consistent and coherent whole. Her mother's infinite love and gratitude to the man who in the world's eyes had been the disgrace and well-nigh ruin of the family—Miss Egerton's abrupt change of feeling in his favor—the agitation shown on the subject by her father—all came back upon her now, and gave to those few broken phrases of Mr. Podmore's a horrible significance which seemed to set her brain on fire. The very anguish of the discovery kept her stunned faculties awake, and she understood every thing—understood that all the reprobation she had ever bestowed by word or thought on her uncle Harold belonged not to him but to her father, the father whom she had loved so, whom she had been so proud of—ah! how proud she had been of him! And now—only to think—

"Carry her to her own room immediately," she heard the doctor's voice say. "It is not fit for her to be here: she ought not to have been allowed to come at all."

What! did they want to take her away from him—from her own father? Did they think she would desert him just because— Ah! but if they all turned round to despise and revile him, she would only love him the more.

She made a violent effort, and, breaking furiously away from the astonished by-standers, rushed forward to the place where that stolid figure still sat mute and motionless. For one instant she paused with something of shrinking as she saw the white face and staring eyes so familiar and yet so strange, but in the next her love had triumphed over every other feeling, and, throwing her arms round the form that had once been her father's, she pressed her warm lips against those cold ones over and over again in a passion of grief and despairing tenderness.

It was long before they could disengage her from that to which she clung so fondly, and when at last they did she had fainted in very truth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LAST OF UNCLE GILBERT'S MONEY.

THERE was bitter grief and passionate lamentation that day at the Laurels—the grief and lamentation of a widow and orphan for one who, whatever might have been his errors, had ever made a loving husband and father.

For Emmy was not left long to be the only mourner. Mrs. Waters, anxious to return as soon as possible, had started alone from Southampton that very morning, and reached home a few hours later, to find her husband no more, and

his guilt proclaimed to all the world by his own deed.

It may be supposed how terrible a blow was dealt to her by the tidings—so terrible indeed it was, that for some time her own life appeared to tremble in the balance. With all his faults, her husband had always remained, in her eyes, the lover of her youth, the friend and companion of her later years, made all the dearer to her by the fierce furnace of affliction through which they had passed together; and, losing him, it seemed as though part of herself were taken from her. And then the sorrow of bereavement was further embittered by the consciousness that the catastrophe which he so dreaded—the catastrophe which he had died in a guilty attempt to avert—had, in consequence of that very attempt, actually taken place, and that his memory was branded as a criminal's in the eyes of all who had known him, in the eyes of his own child—there was the worst of all. That Emmy should know—Emmy, who had held her head so high, who had been so proud of her father and her father's family and all connected with him—and that now she should find out that his was the crime the supposed author of which she had so mercilessly judged—ah! what could she think?

Poor Emmy! the discovery did indeed cost her many a sharp pang of silent anguish. And yet, harrowing as it was to her to know the secret of her father's shame, the knowledge nowise diminished the filial love and tenderness with which she thought of him. Did she not remember that she was guilty too?

The days passed, and the effects of the shock on the bereaved wife were so far softened that the apprehensions at first felt on her account gradually became allayed. It was probably well for her, and her daughter also, that at this time they were forced to think of something else than their grief, by the necessity of breaking up their household, and leaving forever the sumptuous new abode which had witnessed alike their greatest glories and their bitterest sorrows. The funeral was scarcely over when this task was imposed upon them, for the owners of the Laurels could not be expected to let them live there rent-free, and it was ascertained that the remaining available means which Austin had left behind would barely suffice to pay his creditors ten shillings in the pound. Mrs. Waters and Emmy were utterly and absolutely destitute, without a farthing in the world to call their own.

Happily for them they had friends who in this extremity would not see them cast out upon the world without a home. They were, in fact, offered a home yet more magnificent than that from which they had been driven, receiving a pressing invitation from Olivia to fix their quarters at Egerton Park; she had abandoned all idea of giving up Egerton Park now. But they knew that Olivia was at this time busy with renewed preparations for her marriage with Mr. Graham, or rather Harold Maxwell; for he was at liberty now to bear his own name, which was indeed, for the present, quite the most popular in all Chorcombe. It is true that she was willing to delay those preparations somewhat for their sakes, but they did not choose to intrude the presence of mourners into a house which ought to be given up to rejoicing. Another home had therefore to be sought for them; and as they would not accept

any but a very humble one, they were ultimately established, by the joint assistance of Olivia and her betrothed, in a little house in the village street not far from that in which they had lived before, and in no degree better or more comfortable; and yet, mean as it was, they deemed themselves fortunate in securing it.

So they crept back to the old place, how sadly and sorrowfully need not be said.

They had spent dreary days in that street before, but they had always had then something brighter to look forward to, while now there appeared no possibility of better things, and the very faculty of hope seemed to be extinguished in both mother and daughter; for Emmy had lost all trace of natural youthful elasticity, and was, if possible, more depressed, more utterly cast down and crushed, even than Mrs. Waters herself. The memory of her fault and its consequences weighed upon her constantly, repressing all her characteristic buoyancy of spirit and humbling her to the very dust, and this notwithstanding that she had made full confession to her mother and received full forgiveness. It was something to be forgiven by her mother, but she could not so easily forgive herself.

With Emmy thus prostrated it may be imagined how dismal their new home must have looked, especially as it was almost entirely uncheered by any communication with the outer world. During the first days of their bereavement their seclusion was so absolute that they hardly crossed the threshold of their dwelling, and admitted no visits save only those of their own near relation, Harold Maxwell, and Olivia Egerton as his affianced wife. Emmy had through her mother asked and obtained pardon from them also, or she could not have endured their kindness. And in a very short time even the solace of those visits ceased; for one morning, within four or five weeks of the memorable journey to Southampton, Harold Maxwell and Olivia Egerton were married, and went away for a tour on the Continent.

The wedding was very quiet, in consideration of the feelings of poor Austin's wife and daughter, for whose sake both bride and bridegroom wished to escape the demonstrations with which the good people of Chorcombe would otherwise have celebrated the occasion. But unimposing as were the external adjuncts of the ceremony, the knot was tied as firmly as though a train of a dozen bridesmaids had been present at the tying, and the newly-made husband and wife were content, whoever else may have found fault.

Emmy and her mother had been prepared to feel the absence of those two kind friends and comforters very keenly, and so for a time they did, though after the first day or two hardly so much as they had expected. The fact was that just at this juncture an old acquaintanceship was renewed by which it came to pass that other visits were substituted for those which were temporarily dropped.

This renewal of acquaintanceship took place in the following wise:

The mother and daughter were coming out of church on the first Sunday after the departure of Harold and his wife—it was the first Sunday, also, on which the mourners had brought themselves to appear in church, or indeed in any place where they must confront the prying eyes which

they felt would be upon them—when Emmy, through the folds of her thick crape veil, caught a glimpse of a manly well-built figure a few steps in front of her standing quite still just within the door-way, as though waiting for some one. She started violently, and looked round to her mother as if for protection; for, though the face was not just then turned towards her, she knew—how she could not have said, yet nevertheless she did know in a moment—that the figure was that of John Thwaites. But Mrs. Waters was some paces behind, having stopped to speak to a poor woman to whom she had been kind in other days, and who now had intercepted her with some sincere, if ill-timed, expressions of sympathy. There were already two or three groups between her mother and herself, so that it was impossible to turn back without great awkwardness, and Emmy resolved to go forward and wait outside; if she passed quickly enough, perhaps he would not notice her.

She hurried on, therefore, as fast as the throng in front permitted, with lowered eyes and averted head, yet all the while inwardly palpitating with a thousand old memories of the past which that glimpse had brought back. The last time she had seen John Thwaites standing in that door-way, not much less than a year ago now, he had been waiting for her—waiting for her in point of fact at least, though nominally for her father and mother—for in those days he had been wont to walk home with the family from church almost as a matter of course. But since the rise in their fortunes he had never been asked to accompany them, and had never offered; so that, as his place was in the choir gallery, immediately above where Emmy sat, they had scarcely so much as seen each other on Sundays lately—not even at a distance. And only to think of his standing in that door-way again, waiting for somebody, but not for her—ah! who could it be for? Only to think of passing him and never being so much as noticed by him, for she had passed him now, had she not? Yes, she had passed out of the building altogether.

"Miss Waters," she heard a voice just behind her say.

Ah! how well she knew that voice! its tones seemed to vibrate through her so that she hardly knew what to do for trembling. She stopped—she could not have gone forward even if she would—and turned slightly round, not daring, however, to raise her eyes, in spite of the veil that sheltered her.

"I beg your pardon for stopping you," the voice went on, and it quivered as though with some strange agitation, "but—but—but—" here the speaker paused, apparently to seek some available excuse—"But it is so long since I saw you, you know."

"Yes, very long," muttered Emmy, half choking, but she felt absolutely compelled to say something.

"And—and I did not like—I was afraid you might think it a liberty—if—if I called without asking leave. Would you consider it an intrusion if—if sometimes—just to pay my respects—"

There was a sob from under the veil; if her life had depended on it, she could not have kept that sob down.

"Oh! how kind you are! how kind!" and

the veil was not so thick but that he could see the tears streaming down her face as the words broke from her. "After all that has— Ah! how kind you are!"

Her voice was stifled by another sob, and, fearful of giving way altogether in view of the whole departing congregation, she muffled her face in her veil, and turned it hastily away.

He saw what she was afraid of, and did not seek to detain her, only put out his hand and held hers for an instant, saying:

"I will wish you good-bye, then, just for the present. And oh! Miss Emmy, if you only knew—"

He broke off, and, giving her hand a lingering pressure which seemed to take away all abruptness from the sudden conclusion, turned on his heel and was presently lost to sight among the by-standers. Emmy had to muffle up her face closer than ever, but, in spite of her tears, she felt in her heart the first ray of comfort that had penetrated there for weeks. She could never expect to be entirely forgiven, of course, but still only to hear him say such kind words— When her mother rejoined her a few moments afterwards she found her hardly able to speak for weeping, and yet as they walked home together Mrs. Waters might have noticed, if she had looked for it, a certain firmness and elasticity in the girl's step which showed that going out that morning had done her good.

John Thwaites was not long in making use of the implied permission thus received. The very next afternoon he found his way into the little parlor, the counterpart of that in which he had spent so many pleasant hours; and, though the first visit was necessarily more or less a painful one, it was yet so welcome to both mother and daughter that, when he asked leave to repeat it soon, he again found ready assent. And he did repeat it soon—very soon—repeated it time after time, so often, and at such short intervals that neighbors began to gossip on the subject, and to say to each other as they saw him come up the street that they supposed it was quite an understood thing now. And gradually—but not for some little time after the neighbors had begun to make their remarks, for she had grown much more diffident than she used to be—gradually a certain vague hope formed itself in Emmy's mind; could it be that he was going to forgive her altogether? Ah! but then he did not know the full extent of her fault; when he did—and the hope became dashed with fear again.

At last a day came when all doubts were decided—a day when, finding her for a few minutes alone, he asked her in so many words if she would be his wife. She could not say no, and yet for a while she would not say yes; not, however, from any remaining leaven of the old coquettish spirit, but because she insisted on first confessing to him, with many a tear and sob and painful flushing of the cheek, all that she had once done to forfeit her own esteem and his. But when he had heard he only repeated his question yet again, with words of love and devotion even more tender than before, and this time she did not delay her answer.

The neighbors might gossip now as confidently as they pleased; it was an understood thing in very truth.

For three or four months even after this, Emmy

and her mother still clung to their poor home in the village street without any outward change in their way of life, not choosing that any such should be made till at least half a year had elapsed since the death of the husband and father whom they mourned so tenderly; they would fain have made the period of probation even longer, but John Thwaites's importunities were too much for them. About the end of that time, therefore, they began to prepare for removal from that humble dwelling, which they were about to exchange for a larger and more commodious one—not so sumptuous indeed as the Laurels, to say nothing of Chorcombe Lodge, but still infinitely preferable to the mean little cottage which they were leaving. This new abode was a trim little white house in the outskirts of the town, which John Thwaites had taken and begun to furnish. Begun to furnish, it has been said, for his operations were suspended at a very early stage by a letter received from Nidbourne, where Mr. and Mrs. Harold Maxwell, just returned from the Continent, were spending a few weeks before coming to settle down finally at Egerton Park, and whence they now wrote announcing that they had given orders for the furnishing of their niece's future home at their own expense.

Nor did their kindness to the young couple stop even here. A day or two before that fixed for the wedding, they came back from Nidbourne—we may be sure that their visit there had not been without profit to the poor fisherman and his wife, whose misfortunes had contributed so much to bring about their new-found happiness—hastening their return in order to be present at the ceremony, and indeed to take a part in it. For from whose hands should John Thwaites receive his bride but from those of her uncle?—that uncle whom she now loved and honored as much as ever she had once reproached him. And when every thing was over there was slipped into Emmy's hand, as a joint gift from her uncle and aunt, a tiny purse, which, tiny as it was, turned out to contain such a sum in bank-notes as would keep her handsomely supplied with pin-money for an indefinite number of years. So that the poor little bride did not go to her husband quite portionless, after all, though indeed it would not have made any difference in her welcome if she had.

Some years have now passed since the last of the above-recorded events took place; so many that, in the trim white house which is, and has been ever since, the happy home of John Thwaites with his wife and his wife's mother, there are now some four or five other inmates, little rosy-cheeked curly-headed creatures, with pattering feet and merry voices that make music in the ears of their elders—rather too loud music, perhaps, sometimes. What with these permanent additions to the household, and the attendants whom their presence renders necessary, the house is getting too small for the family requirements, and a move is even now in contemplation to another larger and more convenient, and also more suitable to Mr. Thwaites's present position as one of the greatest employers of labor in or near Chorcombe.

For John Thwaites is now a principal partner in the concern of which he was formerly manager, and has prospered so well that, if he cared for living there, *Chorcombe Lodge itself* would scarcely

be beyond his means—only that, after standing tenantless and neglected for a great many years, it has been recently bought up cheap by the Guardians of the Chorcombe Union for their new work-house. So John is building a new house for himself—after a somewhat less ambitious design, certainly, but still promising to be quite one of the best in the neighborhood—on a piece of ground which he has bought close to Egerton Park. This proximity to Egerton Park will prove an immense saving of time and trouble in more than one quarter, the communication between the Thwaites family and that at the great house being very constant. Indeed there is hardly a fine day on which some of the rosy-cheeked curly-headed little people aforesaid do not find their way up to Egerton Park to join certain other little people whom they find there, as rosy-cheeked and curly-headed as themselves, in a game of romps under the trees.

It need scarcely be said that the intercourse between the two families is by no means restricted to those merry gatherings of the children. Olivia and Emmy are almost like sisters in their intimacy, or would be at least, only that, Emmy's mother being Olivia's sister in downright earnest, the fact of their being aunt and niece is necessarily more kept in view than the few years' difference in their ages would seem to warrant. Then between the heads of the two households, Harold Maxwell and John Thwaites, there is the strongest bond of reciprocal respect and goodwill; and although one is more a man of letters, and one more a man of business than the other, each takes sufficient interest in his friend's pursuits to make their meetings as mutually pleasant as they are frequent. And their meetings are very frequent, the members of each family, indeed, feeling themselves nearly as much at home in the one house as in the other.

There is only a single occasion in the whole year when visitors at Egerton Park may not make almost sure of meeting Emmy and her husband and mother, and that is one evening about Christmas-time, when Olivia, who has a strong dislike to any thing like avowed family feuds, makes a point of asking the Clare Court people to dinner. The Clare Court people include Randal and his wife, the widow of a deceased leather-merchant, whom he married a year or two after the final annihilation of his hopes in another quarter, and whose property has completely relieved the family from all financial embarrassment—a circumstance of which she is supposed to take considerable advantage in all matrimonial differences of opinion, which scandal says not unfrequently occur.

It may be understood why Emmy is not invited to meet these guests, but it must be added that the fact of Olivia's bringing herself to entertain them is the most emphatic proof that she could possibly give of her wish to set an example of family harmony. Indeed the sight of Randal Egerton is to Olivia almost as painful as it would be to Emmy herself, reminding her as it does of a danger which she once escaped so narrowly that she can never recall it without a shudder, mingled with a very disagreeable sense of shame and humiliation.

"Ah! Harry," she said to her husband at the conclusion of the latest of these annual penances, "when I see that man, and think how near—you

know what it was I was so near, Harry—when I think of it all, I wonder how you can ever have come to forgive me.”

“My sweet one,” he answered, drawing her fondly towards him—for the two are as lover-like with each other in word and deed as ever they used to be—“how can you say such things? As if you did not know that all the need of forgiveness was on my side—or do you want to make me humble by reminding me?”

“On your side! Oh! Harry, Harry! No, it was on mine—all on mine. The fault was with

the one who first doubted the other, and you never doubted me; but I—”

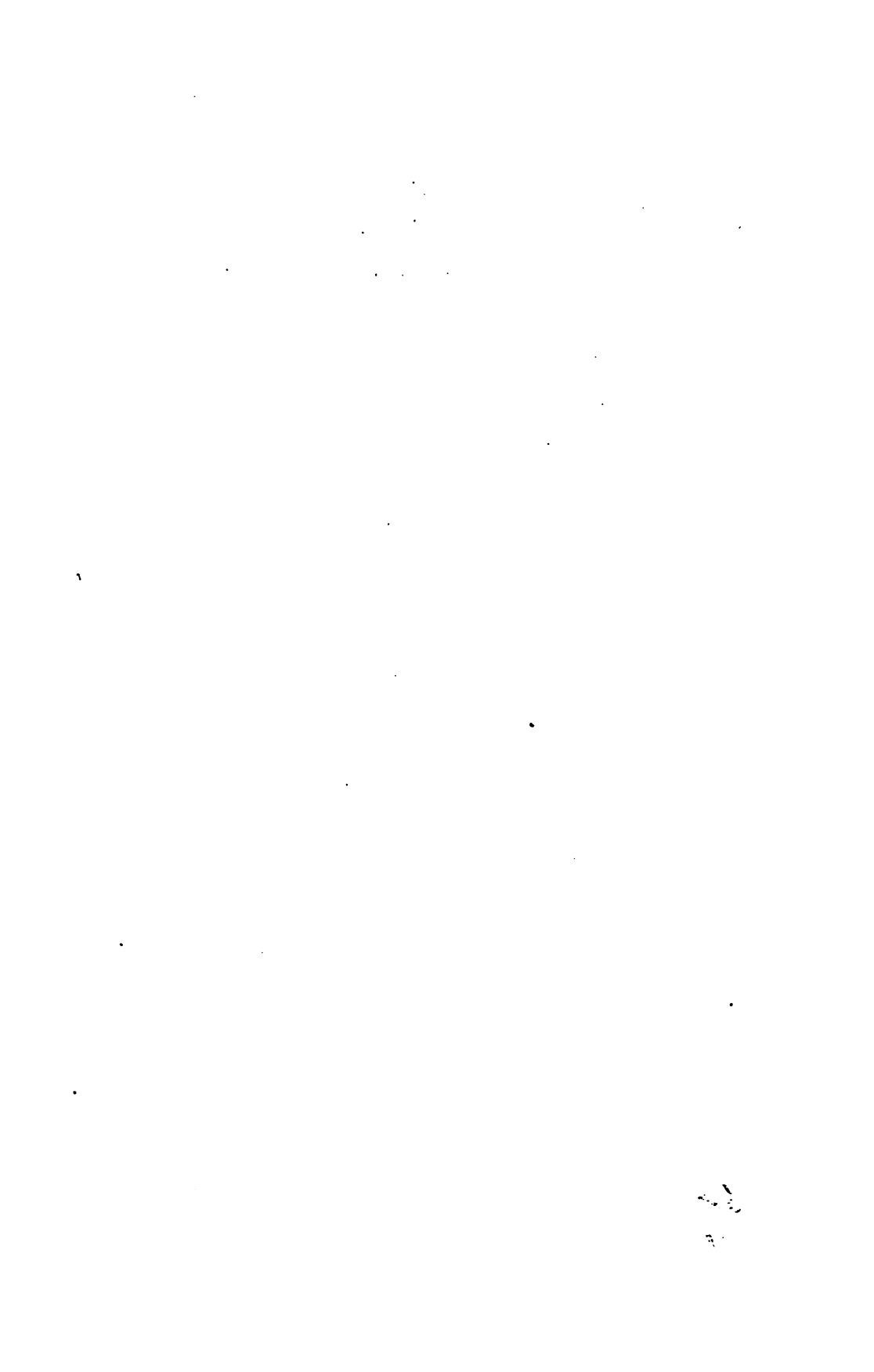
He interrupted the flow of her self-reproaches with a kiss.

“My own impetuous darling!” and he could not forbear smiling at her vehemence. “Very well, we will not quarrel about it; we will say it was nobody’s fault, if you like. And now, my Olivia, we will not talk of those things any more; they were part of an evil that is over, and ought to be forgotten—part of the curse of Uncle Gilbert’s money.”

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THE END.







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